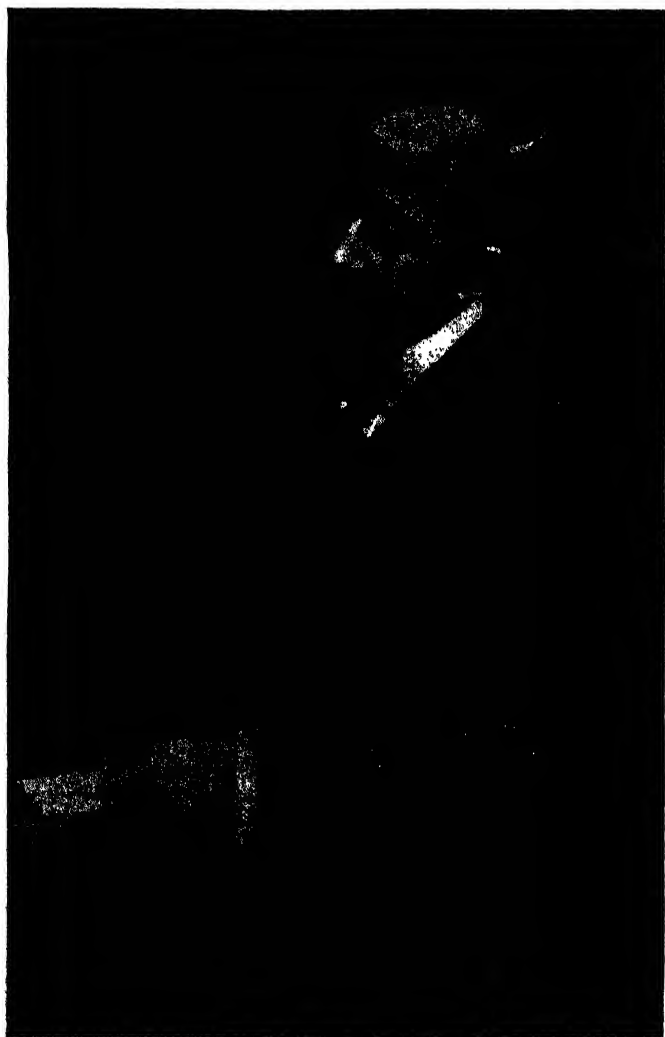


THE DEAD CITY
BY
GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

English Translation by
PROF. G. MANTELLINI



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INTRODUCTION

THE exalted, unselfish, universal spirit of Duse which has known no boundaries of culture in choosing the dramas for her repertory, no preferential frontiers in unfolding her art to the capitals of the world, whether all of them in their insularity were ready on first acquaintance to recognize and accept the gift she brought, is nowhere more graciously and serenely revealed than in her decision to include Gabriele d'Annunzio's "The Dead City" in the repertory of her farewell American tour under the direction of Morris Gest. D'Annunzio had grievously hurt her. But had there been any poets since him? There had not. Therefore, for the sake of Italy which nurtured them both, for the sake of the art of the theater which both of them had served, d'Annunzio must be represented.

The poet of "The Dead City" has been and still is the most amazing figure in the seven arts and the four estates of modern Italy. Poet, I say, for throughout his twenty-one contributions to the stage, he has never forgotten the alchemy of language, although, oftener than not, he has slurred and slighted the dramatic structure and stage-worthiness of his plays. Poet, novelist, classic scholar, amateur archæologist, amateur statesman, amateur warrior, he has been in the theatre for a quarter of a century, though not always of it. Lured thither largely by the stimulus of writing to fulfill the challenge of Duse, he has lavished on play after play, in both the Italian and French languages, the torrential and consuming passion of an imagination akin to that of the Hellenic Golden Age and that of the Renaissance, set paradoxically in modern times. By the sheer force of his word pictures, his mastery of imagery and his instinctive insight into the elemental passions and emotions, he has been able to defy the realistic trend of modern

literature, drama and life, and to revive the magnificence of ages long forgotten. •

In the words of his countryman, Benedetto Croce, "Is he a constructive thinker and a sage? Is he a profound and coherent philosopher? A good counselor? No. But he is a poet and that ought to suffice; the more so that this species of poets by divine right is rarer than that of the sages, the reasoners, and the good counselors."

"The Dead City" was one of the earliest of d'Annunzio's dramatic compositions, dating back to 1898 and preceding those which are perhaps better known, "La Gioconda," "Francesca da Rimini" and "The Daughter of Jorio." Anna, the blind woman, is, of course, Duse's rôle; in the words of the translator of this version of the play, Professor G. Mantellini, "a part of renunciation; the part of a resigned soothsayer, as in 'La Gioconda'; her task, as the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio expresses it, 'is to speak of all the beautiful things in the shadow of an antique statue.' And Duse speaks of these beautiful things with the sweetest music of her voice, which encircles the beautiful phrases, as precious gems in a golden setting, and makes them glitter in all their splendor."

THE EDITOR

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

ALESSANDRO.

LEONARDO.

ANNA.

BIANCA MARIA.

NURSE.

*In Argolis "the thirsty" — near the ruins of Mycenæ
"rich of gold."*

ACT ONE.

A large, light room, opening upon a loggia (piazza) with a balustrade, looking toward the ancient city of the sons of Pelops. The floor of the loggia is higher than that of the room by five stone steps built in shape of a truncated pyramid, as at the entrance of a temple. Two Doric columns support the architrave. Through the opening is seen the Acropolis with its venerable Cyclopic walls broken by the Gate of Lions. In each of the side walls of the room there are two exits leading to the interior apartments and to the staircase. A large table is covered with papers, books, small statues and vases. Everywhere, along the walls, into the empty spaces, are crowded statues, bas reliefs, inscriptions, sculptural fragments: evidences of a remote life, vestiges of a vanished beauty. The presence of all these white objects gives to the room a brilliant and severe, almost sepulchral aspect, in the immobility of the morning light.

[Anna, seated on the highest of the steps leading up to the loggia, her head resting against the shaft of a column, listens in silence to Bianca Maria, who reads to her. The Nurse is seated on a lower step, at the feet of the listener, in a listless attitude, like a patient slave. Bianca Maria is standing, her back against the other column, dressed in a kind of tunic, simple and harmonious like a peplos. Holding in her hands an open book — Sophocles' "Antigone," — she reads with a slow and grave intonation, in which trembles now and then a vague uneasiness, that does not escape the notice of the hearer. The signs of her disquietude and anxiety rouse the latter's attention more and more.]

THE DEAD CITY

BIANCA MARIA [reads]

"O Eros, invincible in strife,
Eros, thou who hurlest disasters,
Who in the soft cheeks
Of the maiden liest in ambush,
Who roamest beyond the sea and through the rustic cottages!
Neither any among the Immortals can escape thee,
Nor any of the short-lived mortals; and whoever has thee
is mad.

Thou drivest the misguided minds
Of the just to ruin;
And thou hast also to this strife
Incited blood relations.

The seductive glance from the eyes of a lovely bride
Wins the victory over the greatest laws.
Even I am being carried beyond the pale of the law
Seeing this; nor can I restrain
Any longer the fountains of my tears
Seeing Antigone on her way to
The nuptial chamber that quiets all.

"*Antigone.*

"Behold me, O citizens of my native country,
Entering upon the last journey,
Looking at the splendor
Of the sun for the last time,
And henceforward never again! Hades, that stills every-
thing, conducts me
From the shore of Acheron alive
And deprived of marriage.
The nuptial hymn shall never be
Sung for me; for I am to espouse Acheron . . . "

[*The reader stops as if suffocating. The book shakes in her hands.*]

ANNA. Are you tired from reading, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA. Perhaps a little fatigued. . . . This
dying spring is so hot that it causes weariness and suffoca-
tion like mid-summer. . . . Do you not feel it too,
Anna? [*She closes the book.*]

ANNA. Have you closed the book?

BIANCA MARIA. I have closed it., [*A pause.*]

ANNA. Is there much light in this room?

BIANCA MARIA. Yes, very much.

ANNA. Is the sun shining on the loggia?

• BIANCA MARIA. It is descending on the column, and is about to touch your neck.

ANNA [*lifts one hand to feel of the column*] There it is, I feel it. How warm the stone is! I seem to touch a living thing. . . . Are you in the sun, Bianca Maria? Once upon a time, when I faced its rays with my dead eyes, the eyelids open, I used to see something like a red vapor, scarcely perceptible, or at times a sparkling similar to that issuing from the hard flint, almost painful. . . . Now, nothing any more: perfect darkness.

BIANCA MARIA. And your eyes are ever beautiful and clear, Anna; and in the morning they are full of freshness, as if sleep were dew for them.

ANNA [*covers her eyes with both hands, resting her elbows on her knees*] Ah, the waking, every morning, what a horror! Almost every night I dream that I can see, dream that by a miracle sight has been granted to my eyes. . . . And to awake always in darkness, always in night. . . . Of nearly all things I have a recollection, of the things I saw when still in the light; I remember their shapes, their colors, their most minute particulars; and their perfect pictures rise for me out of the darkness, as soon as I touch them with my hands. But of my own person I have only a confused recollection as of one dead. A deep shadow has fallen upon my image; time has effaced it, as it effaces in us the pictures of those who have departed. My own image has vanished from me like the images of my beloved dead. . . . Every effort is in vain. I know well that the vision I finally succeed in calling up, is not my true self. Ah, how sad! You tell her, nurse, how many times I have asked you to conduct me before the mirror. There I remained with my forehead against the glass—to recollect, held by I do not know what insensate expectation. . . . And how many times do I even press my hands against my

face — as at present — to obtain its imprint in their softness. Ah, at times I seem truly to bear imprinted in my hands my faithful mask, like those copied in plaster from the dead; but it is a mask without life. [*Slowly she uncovers her face and stretches forth her hollow hands*] Do you realize the horror of such sorrow?

BIANCA MARIA. How beautiful you are, Anna!

ANNA. Last night I had a dream, strange, indescribable. A sudden old age seized all my limbs; I felt over all my body the lines of wrinkles; I felt my hair falling from my head upon my lap in large masses, and my fingers were interlaced like loose straw; my gums were toothless, and my lips were drawn in over the gums, and everything in me had become shapeless and miserable. I was like an old beggar woman whom I used to know, a poor idiot whom I used to see every day before the garden fence when I was still at home, and my mother was yet alive. Do you remember her, nurse? She was called Simona, and always mumbled the same song, hoping to make me smile. . . . It was a strange dream! And it corresponds to a painful sensation that I have at times, when I listen to my life slipping by. . . . In silence and in darkness, at times, I listen to my life hastening by with a roar so terrible, Bianca Maria, that I would gladly die to hear it no more. Ah, you cannot understand!

BIANCA MARIA. I understand, Anna.* Even in the light, the passing hour imparts to me at times an almost unbearable anxiety. It seems that we are waiting for something that will never happen. Nothing has happened, for a long time.

ANNA. Who knows! [*A pause*] I do not feel the sun any longer.

BIANCA MARIA [*turning toward the loggia and looking at the sky*] A cloud is passing, but a light one: a golden cloud in the shape of a wing. Every day the clouds float through the azure sky — arising below, from the Gulf of Argos, and moving toward Corinth. I see them form and pass away. Some of them are marvelous. Sometimes they remain long upon the horizon, and in the evening glow like

funeral pyres. Yet none of them lets fall a drop of water. All the country is thirsty. Yesterday, pilgrims set out from Carvati for the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah, to pray for rain. Everywhere there is drought; and the wind carries the dust of the sepulchers to a great height.

ANNA. You do not love this country, do you, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA. It is too dreary. Sometimes it seems to me almost frightful. When my brother and myself, for the first time, came up to Mycenæ, two years ago, it was the dawning of a burning August day. The plain of Argos behind us was a sea of flame. The mountains were tawny yellow and as savage as lions. We ascended on foot, silent, astonished, almost without breath, and with blinded eyes. From time to time an eddy would rise from the edge of the path, a column of dust and withered grasses, and follow us noiselessly with the step of a phantom. Seeing it approach I could not repress an instinctive shudder, as if those mysterious shapes could renew the terror with which the ancient crimes had inspired me. Upon the edge of a big ditch Leonardo picked up the skin of a snake and said in jest, "This was in the heart of Clytemnestra," and wound it around my hat like a ribbon. Before my eyes the little shining tail swung back and forth with the rustle of a dry leaf. A horrible thirst burned my throat. We looked for the fountain of Perseus in the valley below the citadel. So great was my weariness that as soon as I put my hands and lips into the cool water, I fainted. When I recovered my senses, I appeared to be in dreamland, out of this world, as though after death. The wind raged and eddies of dust pursued each other upon the height, disappearing before the sun, which seemed to devour them. A boundless sadness fell upon my soul; a sadness never before experienced, never to be forgotten. I thought I had come to a place of exile, from which there was no return; and everything assumed, in my eyes, a funereal aspect, which gave me a vague but painful presentiment. . . . I shall never forget that hour, Anna! But Leonardo, full of hope and courage, supported me and dragged me along.

He was sure of finding his princes, the Atridae, intact in the buried sepulchers. He said to me, laughing: "You look like the virgin Iphigenia on the point of being dragged to the sacrifice!" But his gaiety and confidence did not bring back my courage. . . . You see, Anna, that every day his expectation has remained a delusion. . This malignant soil that he turns over without rest, has given him so far only the fever that consumes him. If you could see him, Anna, you would feel uneasy. . . .

ANNA. It is true. His voice at times is like a smothered flame. Yesterday, feeling his emaciated, parched hand, I thought he was ill. He was standing next to me when you entered; he trembled like a man in fear. While you were there, I felt him quiver from time to time, as if your words made him suffer. I have a very singular intuition about such things, Bianca Maria. My eyes are closed to my soul, but it hears. It heard yesterday those poor nerves that were suffering, ah, so much pain. I wanted to speak to you about this, Bianco Maria.

BIANCA MARIA [*with evident anxiety*] Do you believe that my brother is really ill?

ANNA. Perhaps he is only tired. His strength is exhausted. His idea torments him like a passion. Perhaps he does not sleep. Does he?

BIANCA MARIA. I do not know, Anna. Some time ago he abandoned the room where he formerly slept, next to mine. Before that, I knew that his sleep was a profound one from his calm breathing. Now he is farther away.

ANNA. Perhaps he does not sleep.

BIANCA MARIA. Perhaps. His eyelids are inflamed and red. But he lives continually in the midst of that irritating dust; he is always there, bending over, groping in the ruins, digging up the relics, breathing the exhalations from the sepulchers. Oh, what a terrible will power he has. I am certain that he will not take any rest until he has wrung from the earth the secret that he is seeking.

ANNA. He seems to have a secret himself.

BIANCA MARIA. What secret?

ANNA. Who knows! [*A pause.*]

BIANCA MARIA. For some time he has been greatly changed. He was so loving to me, once. I was everything to him, the only companion of his youth. How often have I seen him tired, but not as he is now. He laid his very soul upon my knees, like a child. But no longer. When I go near him he seems to shrink into himself. Formerly, when the intenseness of his thought made his head ache, he would wish me to hold my fingers upon his temples to quiet the painful throbbings, and he was grateful to me, as for a delightful medicine. But no longer. He seems to avoid me. You said, Anna, that my words yesterday made him suffer. . . .

ANNA [*with a very pointed inflection*] Perhaps he feels that there is a change in you, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA [*troubled*] In me?

ANNA [*with the same inflection*] Perhaps he divines the cause of your melancholy and is worried by it.

BIANCA MARIA. The cause of my melancholy?

ANNA [*veiling the pointedness of her question*] You do not like this country, and you desire to depart.

BIANCA MARIA. I am, now and ever, obedient to his will.

ANNA. There is the sun again. Your cloud has vanished. How warm it is! Almost scorching! Give me your hand, please, Bianca Maria. Help me to rise and descend. [*Bianca Maria extends her hand, raises Anna and leads her down the steps. Anna, still holding her hand in her own and drawing near to her as if to listen to the palpitation of her heart, asks suddenly*] Did you see my husband this morning before he went out?

BIANCA MARIA [*hesitating an instant*] Yes, I saw him, together with my brother.

ANNA. Do you know where he has gone?

BIANCA MARIA. He had his horse saddled and took the road to Argos, alone.

ANNA. He has not cared for his work for a long time. He is absent many long hours; when he returns he is silent. Do you remember, Bianca Maria, the first weeks after our

arrival? Do you remember his ardor? He, too, like Leonardo, had great treasures to discover; but they were in his own soul. It seemed as if this land had, above all others, the power to exalt his mind. The flow of poetry was so abundant in him that he would pour it out continually, almost with every word. Do you remember? Now he is taciturn and absorbed.

BIANCA MARIA [*almost with trepidation*] Perhaps he is meditating some grand work. Perhaps he carries in him the weight of some great idea still unshaped. His genius may be about to give life to some marvelous creation.

ANNA. He speaks freely with you, Bianca Maria. Has he not revealed anything to you?

BIANCA MARIA [*always with slight excitement in her voice*] What could he reveal to me that he has not already revealed to you, dear Anna? You are so near to his soul, so near!

ANNA. I am near to his soul as a beggar is near a door. Perhaps he has no more to give to me.

BIANCA MARIA [*sweetly*] Why do you say such things? I see his eyes when they turn toward you. His look repeats constantly that he has nothing dearer, and that he finds nothing more beautiful. . . . How beautiful you are, Anna!

ANNA. You seem to wish to console me for something that I have lost. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Why do you say such things?

ANNA [*listening*] Do you hear? Alessandro is returning. Look, nurse, from the loggia, and see if he is coming.

[*The Nurse, who has remained seated upon the steps, inactive, all this time, rises and ascends to the loggia to look out.*]

NURSE. There is no one on the road.

ANNA. It seemed to me that I heard the steps of the horse. Perhaps he is still at some distance. It is late.

BIANCA MARIA. From the window of my room I can see the entire road to Argos. I am going to see if he is on the way. [*Exit through the second door to the right.*]

[*The Nurse approaches Anna, who has covered her face with her hands.*]

ANNA. I feel like weeping, nurse. [*The Nurse takes her hands to kiss them.*]

NURSE. What has my daughter on her heart?

ANNA. I do not know. Something that presses like a knot; and there . . . a vague fear . . .

NURSE. Fear?

ANNA. Oh, I do not know. . . . Let me sit down. . . . Stay near me! [*She sits down. The Nurse kneels at her feet. She suddenly bends her head toward The Nurse*] Look, nurse, if you can find any white hairs. I must have some. Look well, nurse; here upon my temples; here upon the back of my head. Have you found it? Have you? Only one? Many? Are there many?

NURSE [*who has put her fingers into her hair*] Not one.

ANNA. Not one, really? Are you telling me the truth?

NURSE. Not one.

ANNA. I am still young? Tell me, am I still young? Tell me the truth!

NURSE. So young, indeed.

ANNA. Tell me the truth!

NURSE. Why should I deceive you? You are as white as these statues. No woman is as white as you are.

ANNA. It is true. So Alessandro told me the first time he spoke to me, long, long ago. Ah! That is why I became blind, like the statues! . . . What did Bianca Maria say about my eyes just now? Look at my eyes, nurse, are they not like two opaque stones?

NURSE. They are as clear as two crystals.

ANNA. They are dead, nurse; they are without sight. Do they not cause you a slight shudder, when they are fixed upon you? Do they not frighten you a little? Tell me the truth?

NURSE. Ah, stop! They are still alive—still alive! Some day, suddenly, through the grace of God, they will recover the light they have lost.

ANNA. Never more! Never more!

NURSE. Some day, suddenly: perhaps to-morrow. . . .

ANNA. Never more! Never more!

NURSE. Who knows the will of the Lord? Why should the Lord have left your eyes so beautiful if he had not wished to illumine them once more?

ANNA. Never more!

NURSE. If truly hope were dead, why should my heart tremble every morning when you call me? Why should I turn toward you with the same expectation every morning when I open the window of your room. to let in the light?

ANNA [*with a deep sigh*] If it might be!

NURSE. You also, do you not dream every night that sight has returned to your eyes?

ANNA. Oh, dreams!

NURSE. Believe in dreams! Believe in dreams!

ANNA. Here comes Bianca Maria. Go, go, nurse.

[*The Nurse kisses her hands, rises and goes out of the second door at the left, on her lips a silent prayer.*]

[*Reënter Bianca Maria.*]

ANNA. Is Alessandro coming?

BIANCA MARIA. I saw no one on the road from Argos. In the distance I noticed a cloud of dust; but it was a herd of goats. He may be coming back across the fields. May be, he went down to the fountain of Perseus. [*She ascends the steps and looks from the loggia, between the columns, toward the sun*] The work is at white heat in the Agora. Yesterday they found five funeral strata, sure indications. A great cloud of dust arises from the enclosure. It is a reddish dust; in the sun it seems to burn. Ah! It seems as if it must penetrate the blood like a poison. I am sure Leonardo is there on his hands and feet, lying prostrate, digging with his own hands. He fears that the blow of an iron might break fragile things. [*She turns towards the blind woman*] If you could see how tenderly he takes every fragment out of its coat of earth. Looking at him one would think that he was about to peel a precious fruit, and that he feared to lose a drop of its juice. . . . [*A pause. She descends toward the blind woman, with a swift gliding motion, keeping in the rays of the sun*] Would you like,

Anna, to eat a sweet-scented orange? Would you like to be in a Sicilian garden?

ANNA [*making a gesture in the air as if to draw the young girl to her*] What a strange voice comes from your lips, Bianca Maria! It seems like a new voice, as of one who was asleep and who suddenly awakens. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Does my wish astonish you? Would you not like to have a basket of fruit in your lap? Ah, with what greed I would eat! At Syracuse we used to walk through the orange groves, looking through the boughs at the glittering sea; the trees bore upon their branches the ripe fruit and the new blossoms, the petals fell upon our heads like a fragrant snow; and we bit into the juicy pulp as one bites bread.

ANNA [*stretches out her hands again to draw her to her, while the other still keeps a little away*] It is there you would like to live. There, there is joy. All your being asks for joy, needs joy. Ah, how brilliant your youth should be to-day! The desire of living is radiating from your person like the heat of a fire-place. . . . Let me warm my poor hands!

BIANCA MARIA [*approaches her and sits at her feet upon a low stool. As soon as Anna touches her cheeks she has a visible shiver*] Why are your hands so cold, Anna?

ANNA. Your entire face throbs like a violent pulse.

BIANCA MARIA. The sun has set me on fire. In there at my window I kept watching in the sun. The stone of the sill was almost burning. Here, too, the whole room is now flooded by the sun. The sunshine reaches as far as the feet of Hermes. We are sitting on the bank of a golden stream. Stoop down a little.

ANNA [*touching her vaguely upon the face and hair*] How you love the sun! How you love life! I heard Alessandro tell you one day, that you resembled Victory, unlacing her sandals. I remember — at Athens — in marble as fine as ivory, a delicate and impetuous figure, which gave one the desire to fly, to soar through the air forever. . . . I remember: her small head stood out from the curve of her wings, which hung in repose from her shoulders.

Alessandro said that the impatience to fly was expressed in every fold of the tunic, and that no other statue represented more vividly the gift of divine swiftmess. . . . We lived for a time in the enchantment of that youthful grace. Every day we ascended to the Acropolis to look at it again. Is it true that you resemble her, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA [*troubled by the strange manner of the blind woman who continues to touch her*] I have no wings. You look for them in vain!

ANNA. Who knows! The wings invisible are the ones that fly the furthest. Every virgin can be a messenger. . . . [*A pause. She continues to finger Bianca Maria, who makes an involuntary movement as if to draw away*] Will you not allow me to touch you? I feel that you are beautiful, and I would like to picture to myself your beauty. Are my hands repulsive to you?

BIANCA MARIA [*takes her hands and kisses them*] No! No! Anna. But I cannot tell you the sensation they give me. It seems as if your fingers could see. . . . I do not know. It is like a gaze that persists, that presses. . . . Each of your fingers is like an eye that opens. . . . Ah, your whole soul seems to descend to the extremities of your fingers, and your flesh seems to lose its human qualities. The color of these veins is unspeakably . . . [*She places her lips upon the hollow of Anna's left hand, trembling*] Do you not feel my lips upon your soul?

ANNA [*in secret despair*] They burn, Bianca Maria. They are as heavy as if all the wealth of life was gathered in them. How tempting must your lips be! All the promises, and all the persuasions must be in them.

BIANCA MARIA. You disturb me. . . . My life is bounded by a narrow circle, perhaps forever. I was reading to you awhile ago the *Antigone*. From time to time I seemed to be reading my own destiny. I, too, have consecrated myself to my brother. . . . I, too, am bound by a vow!

ANNA [*with passionate and anxious tenderness*] The forces of your life are too grand to be consumed in sacrifice. You must live. . . . You must rejoice, bite the fruit, pluck

flowers, dear soul. I seem to feel in you a glowing fire. All your blood beats in your face so strangely. . . . O, I have never felt such a strong pulsation. . . . Your heart. . . . Your heart. . . . [*She searches for Bianca Maria's heart, bending down to listen to its beating. She speaks in a low, almost mysterious voice the following words*] It is terrible, your heart. . . . It seems to want the whole world. . . . It is wild with eagerness.

BIANCA MARIA. Oh, Anna! [*She trembles and shrinks away from the hands of the blind woman as from slow torture that enervates and exhausts.*]

ANNA. Do not tremble! I am like a dead sister of yours returned from the grave. Once my blood, too, beat so; and my desire, too, toward the immensity of life was boundless. I know what you dream, what you suffer, and what you expect. . . . There is, there is happiness on earth; there hangs over every head the hour of joy. You devotedly follow your brother who lives amid ruins, and digs in sepulchers; but you cannot renounce your hour. An imperious force has suddenly risen within you. You cannot repress it any longer. If you should succeed in cutting off its stem, a thousand sprouts would rise from its roots. You must yield. [*Bianca Maria hides her face in the lap of the blind woman and remains in this position, trembling*] Do not tremble. I am like a dead sister of yours, who watches over you from beyond. Maybe, I am for you like a shadow; I am in another world. You see what I do not see. I see what you do not see. Therefore, you feel separated from me by an abyss. You cannot yield your soul to mine as you yield your head to my lap. Is it not so? [*She puts her hands upon the hair of the reclining girl, caressing it; then she drops them*] How much hair! How much hair! It is soft to the touch, like running, tepid water. How much! How much! It is marvelous! If it should come down, it would cover you to your feet. Ah, it is coming down! [*The loosened hair falls upon the shoulders of Bianca Maria and down Anna's dress, in luxuriant waves. The hands of the blind woman follow its ripples*] It is a torrent. It covers you completely. It touches the ground. It covers

me also. How much! How much! It has a perfume, a thousand perfumes. A torrent full of flowers. . . . Ah, you are all beauty. . . . You have all the gifts! [*She puts her hands upon her temples, and upon her cheeks, convulsively, with a gesture of anguish, as if feeling lost. Her voice becomes veiled*] How could one who loved you renounce you? How could you remain in the shade? You who have been created to give joy! Some part of you was asleep in the depths, which now has awakened. Now you know yourself, do you not? I have watched your steps at times. You move as if in tune with an inner well-known melody. . . . Ah, if I myself could pronounce the word of happiness for you, Bianca Maria! [*Bianca Maria sobs, buried under her hair, suffocating*] You are weeping? [*She draws the hair against her eyelids to feel the tears*] You are weeping! You are weeping! Ah, woe to us! [*A pause. Bianca Maria sobs, always in the same position. Anna turns restlessly toward one of the doors. A great anxiety shows in her face as she hears a rapid step on the stairway*] Here is Alessandro!

[*Bianca Maria rises to her feet, her face hidden in her hair which covers her completely, trembling and terrified in the light of the sun.*]

[*Alessandro enters through the first door to the right, carrying a bunch of wild flowers in his hand, a little out of breath and heated. He starts back at seeing Bianca Maria in such a condition, and his confusion is apparent.*]

ANNA [*her voice calm and soft again*] Where do you come from, Alessandro? We have been waiting for you a long time. Bianca Maria, from her window, watched the road to Argos to descry your horse; but you did not appear. Where do you come from?

ALESSANDRO [*in a clear, ringing voice, with sober and simple intonation which reveals the strength of a spontaneous and deep feeling in everything he says*] I have been riding through the country at random. I crossed the Inachos, which has not a drop of water in it. . . . All the fields are covered with little wild flowers that are dying; and the song of the larks fills the sky! It is marvelous!

I never heard such impetuous singing. Thousands of larks, a countless multitude. . . . They flew up from everywhere, darting toward the sky with the speed of arrows; they seemed mad, vanishing in the light without re-appearing, as if consumed by their own song or devoured by the sun. . . . One fell suddenly at the feet of my horse like a stone, and lay there lifeless, struck down by intoxication from having sung with too much joy. I picked it up. Here it is!

ANNA [*stretching out her hand and taking the lark*] Ah, it is still warm. How soft and delicate its throat is. It was singing a little while ago! Look at it, Bianca Maria. [*Bianca Maria approaches timidly, embarrassed by her hanging hair*] You tremble. . . . She feels ashamed of her hair, Alessandro. She was sitting near me just now, when it became unfastened in my hands, and suddenly inundated me. . . . It is wonderful! She must be entirely covered by it. You see her! You see her! Are you standing in the sun, Bianca Maria? Give her your flowers, Alessandro! Give her your flowers!

[*Bianca Maria tries to gather her hair and coil it upon her head.*]

ALESSANDRO [*astonished and perplexed, but smiling, advances toward the girl*] Take these flowers, Bianca Maria. [*Bianca Maria holds out her hands, having gathered up her hair confusedly, and uncovered her face upon which appear the traces of tears*] You have been crying?

ANNA. She was reading *Antigone* to me, and suddenly the sadness of it overwhelmed her. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You wept for *Antigone*!

ANNA. Upon the steps of the loggia she was looking at the clouds of dust arising from the Agora; and the thought of her brother caused her anxiety. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You were reading the story of the watcher. . . . *Antigone* is never so beautiful as under that tempest of fiery dust in the arid plane, crying and imprecating over the naked corpse of her brother. Is it not so? Sitting upon a hill against the wind, so as to escape the odor of

the decomposing body, the watchers await with closed eyes the passing of the blinding tempest; and she, undaunted in the midst of the atrocious furnace, gathers the dust with her hands and throws it over the corpse. . . . Ah, I always see her thus! . . . She is not so beautiful and grand when she leads Œdipus by the hand, or when going to her death. Is she? I should have liked to be here when you read, Bianca Maria. I have never heard you read.

ANNA. Why not read a few pages more?

BIANCA MARIA. I have not the book.

ANNA. Did you leave it upon the window-sill?

BIANCA MARIA. I left it . . . I do not know where, Anna.

ALESSANDRO. Will you read to me some day?

BIANCA MARIA. Whenever you wish.

ALESSANDRO. Some day I should like to hear you read Sophocles' *Electra* in the shadow of the Gate of Lions.

ANNA. Ah, the invocation to light!

ALESSANDRO. Some day I should like to hear you read one of my poems.

ANNA. Which one?

ALESSANDRO [*with an air of uncertainty*] Which one?

[*A pause. A confused noise comes through the loggia. Bianca Maria rapidly ascends the steps and looks toward the Acropolis.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*growing excited*] They are the men in the Agora. They are shouting with joy. . . . Perhaps they have discovered a tomb; perhaps they have found the king. . . . Leonardo! Leonardo!

ALESSANDRO [*ascending to her side*] Do you see Leonardo?

BIANCA MARIA. No, I do not see him. . . . The dust hides everything; the wind is stronger. He must be there, on his knees under the dust. . . . Leonardo!

ALESSANDRO. Your voice cannot reach him. He cannot hear you.

BIANCA MARIA. They shout no longer. . . . Listen! [*Her hair is falling, disheveled, from the top of her head again.*]

ALESSANDRO. They shout no longer. We hear nothing more.

[*A pause. The two remain for a while near each other, silent. The wind blows Bianca Maria's hair toward Alessandro.*]

• ANNA. It is strange, this silence. [*The two descend the steps, pensive. Suddenly Bianca Maria, feeling her hair pulled, utters a slight cry. The blind woman springs to her feet trembling. The dead lark falls from her lap*]
Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO [*trying to laugh*] It is nothing, Anna. A little of Bianca Maria's hair caught in the setting of my ring and pulled out. . . . Did you feel any pain?

BIANCA MARIA. Oh, hardly any. . . . [*Laying the flowers upon a step, she tries to arrange her hair.*]

ALESSANDRO. Forgive me. I had not noticed. . . .

ANNA [*with simulated simplicity*] Bianca Maria's hair is so soft! Did you notice, Alessandro? I would like to have it always in my fingers, like a spinning woman. [*She approaches Bianca Maria unsteadily and leans upon her shoulder in a caressing way.*]

ALESSANDRO [*still trying to laugh*] Oh, I have never dared to touch it. The wind blew it toward me. The rape of the lock was an involuntary one; a few threads of silk to tie scattered pages together. . . . [*He tries to disentangle the hair from his ring*] But they are inextricable. What knots chance can tie!

BIANCA MARIA [*shivering*] Listen! [*A clamor is heard again*] They are still shouting.

ANNA. Some great sight. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Did you notice, Bianca Maria, how uneasy and anxious Leonardo was this morning? He seemed to be coming out of a nightmare. . . . Perhaps he had been visited in his dreams by the "King of Men," and had wakened with some great presentiment? Did not the ardor in his eyes pain you? I could not look at him without suffering. I thought of him constantly a long time in the fields. I hoped he would come to meet me: he would have heard the song of the larks and picked some flowers with

those fingers of his, which have known nothing but stone and dust for too long a time. Ah, it is a long time since he began to bend over the gray, hard clay! Fascinated by the tombs, he has forgotten the beauty of the sky. I must tear him away at last from that accursed spot. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. You alone can do it. You know what power you have over him.

ANNA [*in a low voice*] He is ill, very ill.

[*Bianca Maria looks at her with a shiver, frightened and dropping the bunch of flowers.*]

ALESSANDRO. Truly, at times, he has the looks of a man bewitched. The earth he digs in is malignant; it seems that exhalations of monstrous crimes still arise from it. The curse which weighed upon the Atridae was so horrible that it seems truly as if some dreadful vestige of it still remains in the dust which was once trod by them. I understand how Leonardo, who lives a most intense inner life, should be troubled by it almost to frenzy. I fear that the dead he is looking for, and does not discover, have been revived within himself, and breathe within him with the tremendous force infused in them by Æschylus, enormous and bloody as they appear in the "Orestiad," ever pierced by the sword and firebrand of Destiny. Ah, how many nights have I seen him enter my room and seat himself by my bed, with the book that made him sleepless! How many nights he has watched with me, reading those grand verses aloud, which wearied him like cries, too immense for human breath! With the touch of that accursed soil, every day, every day, he must feel his fever grow. All that ideal life with which he has nourished himself must have assumed in him the shape and the body of reality. I think that at every stroke of the pickaxe he must tremble through all his bones, anxious to see the face of an Atrides really appear, still intact, with the visible signs of the violence suffered, of the cruel slaughter. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Listen! Listen! [*A new, prolonged clamor is heard. Bianca Maria, agitated, impatient, ascends to the loggia, and looks toward the Agora in the bright sunshine*] They have ascended the wall . . . two, three, four

men, upon the wall . . . they are shouting, shouting for joy. . . . They call to me, waving their arms. . . . Look! Look! [*Anna has grasped Alessandro's wrist tightly, and remains at the foot of the steps, wild with anxiety. Bianca Maria advances and leans over the balustrade shouting. At intervals, between her short phrases, she seems to take in the signs and some of the words of her brother, who is rapidly approaching*] Leonardo! I see Leonardo. . . . He is there, he is there. . . . I see him. . . . Now he is in the Gate of Lions; he is coming down running — all white with dust. . . . Some great event! Some great discovery! . . . Brother! . . . Ah! he falls down . . . he struck his foot against a rock. . . . My God! . . . He rises; runs. . . . Brother! . . . See him! See him! . . . The sepulchers. . . . He has discovered the sepulchers . . . all his sepulchers. . . . God be praised! . . . Ah, what joy, what joy! . . . My brother! . . . Here he is! . . . Here he is! He is coming! [*She descends to the room, runs to the door and opens it*] At last! At last! . . . Here he is! . . . He enters! . . . He ascends the stairs! . . . At last all is joy, all is joy! . . . Brother! Brother!

[*Leonardo enters by the first door at the right, white with dust and dripping with perspiration. His eyes are radiant in his almost unrecognizable face. His excitement prevents him from speaking; and his hands, soiled with earth and stained with blood, are trembling. The whole room is flooded with sunlight.*]

LEONARDO. The gold, the gold . . . the corpses . . . an immense amount of gold . . . all the corpses covered with gold. . . . [*His emotion suffocates him. Bianca Maria and Alessandro stand near him breathless, affected by the same excitement. Anna, standing alone and leaning upon the edge of the table, bends forward toward the voice of the newcomer.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*with pitying tenderness*] Be calm, be calm, Leonardo; take your breath again. Rest a minute! . . . Are you thirsty? Do you wish something to drink?

LEONARDO. Yes, give me a drink! I am dying with thirst.

[*Bianca Maria goes to the table, fills a glass with water and hands it to him. He drinks it with avidity, in one draught.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*trembling*] 'Poor brother!

ALESSANDRO. Sit down, I beg of you! Rest a minute. . . .

LEONARDO [*touching Alessandro's shoulder*] Ah, why were you not there? Why were you not there? You, you ought to have been there, Alessandro! The grandest and most wonderful vision that was ever offered to mortal eyes; an apparent hallucination; unheard of wealth; a terrible splendor revealed, all of a sudden as in a superhuman dream. . . . I cannot tell, I cannot describe what I have seen. A succession of tombs: fifteen corpses intact, one by the side of the other, upon a bed of gold, their faces covered with golden masks, their brows crowned with gold, their chests enveloped in gold; and everywhere, upon their bodies, at their sides, at their feet, a profusion of golden objects, — numberless as the leaves fallen in a fabulous forest: an indescribable magnificence, one immense, dazzling view, the most resplendent treasure that Death has ever gathered in the darkness of the earth, in centuries, in thousands of years. . . . I cannot tell, I cannot tell, what I have seen. You, you ought to have been there, Alessandro. You alone would have been able to picture. . . . [*He stops an instant as if oppressed by want of breath. All are eagerly watching his feverish lips*] In one instant this soul passed over hundreds, thousands of years, breathed in the frightful legend, palpitated with the horror of the ancient 'slaughter. The fifteen corpses were there, with all their members, as if just deposited after the killing, hardly burned by the fire extinguished too soon: Agamemnon, Eurymedon, Cassandra, and the royal escort: buried with their garments, their weapons, their diadems, their vases, their jewels, all their riches. . . . Do you remember, do you remember, Alessandro, that passage of Homer: "They lay between the vases and the decorated tables, and all the room was stained with blood. And I heard the lamenting voice of the daughter of Cassandra, whom the perfidious Clytemnestra stabbed at my

side . . ."? For an instant my soul has lived an antique and violent life. They were there, the murdered ones: the king of kings, the enslaved princess, the charioteer and the guests, — there, under my eyes for an instant, motionless. As vapor vanishes, as foam melts away, as dust is dispersed, like I do not know what unspeakably evanescent and fleeting thing, they all passed away in the silence. It seemed to me that they were swallowed by the same fatal silence that reigned over their radiant immobility. I do not know what happened. A mass of precious things remains there. a treasure without equal, the witness of a great forgotten civilization. . . . You will see, you will see!

ANNA [*very softly*] What a dream!

ALESSANDRO. What a glory! What a glory!

LEONARDO. You will see! The golden masks. . . . Ah, why were you not there, at my side! . . . The masks protected the faces from contact with the air, and the faces must have remained natural. One of the corpses, surpassing in stature and majesty all the others, was adorned with a large golden crown, with the armor, the belt and the golden spurs. Surrounded by swords, spears, poniards, and cups, covered with numberless golden discs thrown profusely upon the body like wreaths, more venerable than a demigod. I was leaning over him when he vanished in the light; I was raising the heavy mask. . . . Ah! Have I not, in truth, seen the face of Agamemnon? Was he not the king of kings, perchance? His mouth was open, his eyes were open. . . . Do you remember, do you remember in Homer: "As I lay dying I lifted my hand toward my sword; but the woman with the dog's eyes went away and would not close my eyelids nor my mouth . . . at the moment when I was descending into the home of Hades"? Do you remember? The mouth of the corpse was open now, the eyelids were open. . . . He had a large forehead, ornamented with a round golden band; the nose was long and straight; the chin, oval; and when I raised the armor I thought I noticed the hereditary sign of the tribe of Pelops, "the shoulder of ivory." . . . Everything vanished in the light. A handful of dust and a mass of gold. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*astonished and dazzled*] You speak like one coming out of a hallucination, like one who is the prey of a delirium. What you say is incredible. . . . If you have really seen what you say, you are no longer a human being.

LEONARDO. I saw it, I saw it! . . . and Cassandra! How we loved the daughter of Priam, "the flower of the booty!" Do you remember? How you loved her, with the same love as Apollo! She pleased you, deaf and dumb upon her chariot, with her "look of a wild animal just taken," owing to the Delphic fire which was smoldering under her sibylline tongue. Many a night her prophetic cries have awakened me. . . . And she was there just now, supine upon a bed of golden leaves with numberless golden butterflies upon her garment, her brow bound with a diadem, her neck ornamented with necklaces, her fingers covered with rings; and a golden pair of scales rested upon her breast, the symbolic scales with which the destinies of man are weighed, and an infinity of golden crosses formed of four laurel leaves surrounded her; and her two sons, Teledamos and Pelops, wrapped in the same metal, were at her sides like two innocent lambs. . . . Thus I saw them. And I was crying to you aloud when she vanished. But you were not there! You will see her wrappings, you will touch her empty girdle. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*impatient and excited*] I must see, I must run. . . .

[*Leonardo holds him back with his hand, urged by an irresistible need of saying more, of communicating to others all his feverish excitement.*]

LEONARDO. Marvelous vases, four-handled, ornamented with little doves, like Nestor's cup in Homer; large heads of oxen, all of solid silver, with golden horns; thousands of plates wrought in the shape of flowers, leaves, insects, shells, octopi, Medusas, stars; fantastic animals of gold, ivory, crystal; sphinxes, griffins, chimeras; small figures of divinities with arms and heads loaded with doves; little temples with towers crowned with doves, their wings spread; lion-hunts and panther-hunts engraved upon blades.

of swords and lances; ivory combs, bracelets, lockets, seals, scepters, wands. . . . [*While he pictures these splendors Anna lets herself fall upon a chair and covers her face with her palms, leaning forward, and her elbows upon her knees.*]

ALESSANDRO [*breaking away*] Let me go! Let me go!

LEONARDO [*rising, very loud*] I go with you. . . . Let us go!

BIANCA MARIA [*embracing her brother and beseeching him, her hair again falling about her*] No, no, Leonardo, I beg of you. Remain here a while, rest a little, recover at least your breath! You are too tired, you are exhausted!

ALESSANDRO. I am going, I am going! [*Exit by the door leading to the stairs.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*still holding her brother in her arms, compassionately*] Oh, how weak you are, my poor brother, my poor brother! You are wet through. . . . The perspiration is mixed with dust. . . . Your face is almost black . . . and those poor eyes, those poor eyes! How inflamed they are! Your eyelids are as red and swollen as if you had been weeping a whole year. . . . Do they not ache? Oh, how they must ache, poor eyes! I will give you a lotion I know, to lave them. You will take a rest, won't you? You will rest now that your wish is fulfilled. . . . You have covered yourself with glory; you were splendid a while ago when you entered, you were resplendent from all that gold. . . . [*Her falling hair almost covers him as she sinks against his breast. With infinite tenderness she wipes his brow, and his eyes, his cheeks, his neck with her hair; she enfolds him with her love. Leonardo appears as if repelled, rigid; with an extraordinary expression of pain and of terror upon his exhausted face of a deadlike pallor*] Let me wipe the perspiration away, let me. I cannot tell you the sorrow you cause me. . . . I do not know what to say to you to relieve your weariness, to calm your blood, to revive your color; I do not know what balm, what draught. . . . Ah, how many days, how many days you have spent there, prostrate upon the earth, in the excavations, swallowing that cursed dust, tearing your hands on the stones, without rest, without rest! Poor hands! They are all torn, stained with

blood, the fingernails split, almost without flesh, dry as flint. . . . Do they not ache? Poor hands! I will give you an ointment that I perfumed sweetly with violets — which will heal them in a short time, and make them as soft and white as they were once. . . . I remember. You used to have such fine and beautiful hands. . . . How you tremble! How you tremble! [*Anna suddenly lifts her head*] You must feel like dying with weariness. You have lived at such a tension, like a bow ready to break! Not a vein in you but trembles, and your muscles twitch like cords unstrung. . . . You are suffering, you are suffering! [*Struck by the remembrance of the words spoken by Anna, she stops with an expression of anguish. Then she takes in her hands her brother's head, looking sharply into his eyes*] You have nothing against me, have you? I have done nothing to you, have I? I have done nothing to cause you pain. Tell me, tell me, Leonardo! Answer!

LEONARDO [*in a faint voice, trying to smile*] Oh, nothing!

BIANCA MARIA. I never loved you as much as I do now, brother. My tenderness for you has never been so deep. You are my continual thought, you are everything to me. Take me where you will, to the most sterile desert, to the most desolate ruin; and if you smile and are contented, I shall be happy. I, too, will remain in the midst of the dust; I, too, will tear my hands upon the stones; I, too, will gather the bones of the dead; but you must smile, you must have a cheerful countenance. . . . Do you remember, do you remember? At Syracuse you used to sing in the midst of your work, and you seemed to have in your soul the beauty of the statue for which you were looking. I was picking the sweetest oranges to bring you; and you did not wish to eat them unless peeled by my fingers. Do you recollect? When you were tired you fell asleep with your head upon my knees, in the shadow of the olive trees; and I guarded your calm sleep, thinking of the statue you were trying to find. Ah, how long, how long have I not watched over your sleep! You must need an infinity of sleep. . . . You can no longer raise your eyelids. . . . Come, come to

your room! Let me help you. Let me be like a mother to you! You must sleep. You must have a long, deep sleep; you must have your soul clarified like tranquil water. . . . When you wake again you will see all the gold you have discovered, as at the bottom of your soul, and I will still be at your bedside. Come, come! [*He endeavors to draw away from the sweet embrace as if from unbearable torture*] I cannot bear to feel you tremble so! Come!

LEONARDO. I must go back there.

BIANCA MARIA. It is impossible. It is noon. Do you not see! The sun is shining everywhere, a sun that burns. . . . Have you not left your men up there?

LEONARDO. I must return, I must return!

BIANCA MARIA. It is impossible. You cannot go back there as you are. . . . You would fall on the way. . . . Listen to your sister! You look as if you were going to faint. . . . Let me support you! [*She presses him back and twines her arms about his shoulders, covering him tenderly with her hair. He looks deadly pale and desperate. Anna rises silently and moves toward them, listening, while they go out through the second door to the right. The room is flooded with sunlight.*]

[*Anna, alone, takes a few uncertain steps, oppressed by a deep gloom.*]

ANNA [*in a hollow voice, as if from within*] No one has spoken to me. I am in another life. . . . And all that funereal gold. . . . And that poor, trembling soul. . . . And all that sweet life that is glowing in the beautiful creature. . . . [*Her feet touch the bunch of wild flowers, which have fallen from Bianca Maria's hands*] Ah, the wild flowers he picked for her! [*She stoops, takes the whole bunch, buries her face in it and remains mute for a moment*] I would I could weep! [*She takes a few steps more*] Nurse! Nurse!

NURSE [*rushing from the second door to the left*] Here! Here I am. [*Takes one hand of the blind woman and kisses it.*]

ANNA. The hour?

NURSE. It is noon.

ANNA. Here, take these flowers and put them in a vase of water.

NURSE. They are all withered; they cannot revive.

ANNA [*letting the bunch fall*] Let us go. . . . [*While going out, guided by the nurse, she stops and turns around as if remembering something*] Ah, look around there, nurse, look on the floor. . . .

NURSE [*bends down to look*] What have you lost?

ANNA. Look there. . . . It is a dead lark!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO.

A room in the apartment of Leonardo. Along the walls, which are painted a dark red, stand large cases with several shelves, containing the treasures found in the sepulchers of the Agora; the jars, breastplates, masks, diadems, swords and girdles of gold, glitter dimly in the half-light. Upon two inclined tables shaped like biers, rich ornaments, which had covered the forms of Agamemnon and Cassandra, are arranged so as to produce the effect of the absent bodies. Some caskets filled with gold, and a few vases of brass containing ashes, are at the foot of the tables. A closed door is on the right side. In the background an open balcony looking toward the plain of Argos and the distant mountains. The hour of sunset approaches.

[Bianca Maria is discovered arranging the marvelous objects. She stoops to take the necklaces, bracelets, combs, buckles and little idols from the caskets and arrays them upon one of the tables about the golden mask of the prophetess. Some spirals of golden thread hang between her fingers, small spirals which were used to fasten the hair around the head. She fastens them coquettishly in her own hair. Alessandro's voice is heard outside the door.]

ALESSANDRO. Leonardo, are you there?

BIANCA MARIA *[trembling, hesitating]* My brother has just gone out . . . I do not know where. . . . *[She goes to the door and opens it. Alessandro appears on the threshold.]*

ALESSANDRO *[almost timidly]* Ah, you are alone . . . alone in the midst of gold . . . I was looking for Leonardo.

BIANCA MARIA. I do not know where he has gone . . . Perhaps he descended to the fountain of Perseus. . . . *[They avoid looking at each other.]*

ALESSANDRO [*making one step into the room*] Have you remained to watch the treasure, Bianca Maria? . . . What were you doing?

BIANCA MARIA. I was replacing Cassandra's jewels around her. See, that casket is full of them. I promised my brother that everything should be in order on his return at nightfall. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Do you wish me to help you? It is already late.

BIANCA MARIA. It is late . . .

ALESSANDRO [*advancing toward the relics*] Strange! There seems to issue from this gold an indistinct figure . . . The twilight, or a night lamp, could deceive the eye and re-create the entire form. Certainly, Leonardo is aware of this illusion. He must have seen more than once the vision of Priam's daughter.

BIANCA MARIA [*sighing*] Ah, his eyes seem to see nothing else but phantoms!

ALESSANDRO [*softly*] I am not less sad for his sake than you are, Bianca Maria. I was looking for him, hoping . . . Of late, when he is with me, he seems to be continually driven by an anxiety to reveal a secret to me. I allow silence to fall upon us, and wait, not any less anxious than he. His lips swell, they seem ready to open. But he abandons the idea, and they remain closed. I dare not question him, fearing to drag from him a word that his soul would not yet tell me. And we suffer together, silently. [*A pause*] What are you thinking of, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA [*shaking off her thoughts*] Will you not help me? My brother will return soon. [*She stoops over the casket and at that moment Alessandro looks at her.*]

ALESSANDRO. What have you in your hair? [*He approaches her.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*in confusion*] Ah, the spirals. . . . I put them on as an experiment. I wish to show them thus to Leonardo, who entertains some doubt about their former use. [*She starts to take them off.*]

ALESSANDRO [*with an unsteady gesture trying to prevent*

her, without, however, touching her] No, no. Why do you wish to take them off? Leave them where they are!

BIANCA MARIA [*attempting to smile*] I must restore them to the dead princess, whom you loved so much. . . .

ALESSANDRO. No, no! Keep them yet a while in your hair! [*In trying to prevent her from taking them off, he touches her hand 'lightly. Both are troubled. They look at each other with a sort of restrained violence. A pause.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*lowering her eyelids, softly*] You do not help me. . . .

[*A new pause. Both stoop over the caskets of gold.*]

ALESSANDRO. Look at the carving of this ring: a woman, sitting, holding three poppies, with three ambiguous figures standing before her, and upon her head a double-edged axe, and the brilliant disc of the sun. Look at this other: a young woman holding out her arms, turning her head backward; before her a man, also holding out his arms. Look: the woman has luxurious hair.

BIANCA MARIA. She turns her head backward. . . .

[*A pause. Bianca Maria continues to arrange the ornaments around the mask. Alessandro goes out on the balcony and remains looking at the landscape for a few instants. Both are struggling against the anguish that seizes them.*]

ALESSANDRO. This arid country has, in truth, the feverish aspect of thirst personified. Other lands soften and breathe when night approaches. This one tells of the torture of its thirst even at night. Up to the last gleam of twilight you see the beds of its dried-up rivers whitening dolefully. The mountains over there, do they not look like a herd of enormous asses, with their rigid backs rising one above the other? One feels that down behind Pontino the swamp of Lerna is steaming. Look how inflamed Arachnæus is. Almost every evening its summit is red, in memory of that fire which announced to the scouts of Clytemnestra the fall of Troy. From the mount of Ida to Arachnæus, what a long line of signal fires! We were reading again yesterday of the marvelous number of mountain pyres kindled by Victory . . . And now you may sift

through your fingers the ashes of him who announced his return by such signs! You wear in your hair the ornaments of the royal slave whom he chose from the spoils of war! [*He moves again toward Bianca Maria, looking at her*] And all that is simple, as you do it. The abyss of time is filled, between you, the living, and the belongings of the king and the prophetess, that are in your keeping. All this gold seems to belong to you from time immemorial, for you are Beauty and Poetry; and everything returns in the circuit of your breathing, everything falls naturally under your dominion. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*pale and trembling, resting her back against the table of the golden relics*] Do not speak to me thus!

ALESSANDRO. Why do you not wish me to speak to you of the truth which you have revealed to my spirit? Do you not think, Bianca Maria, that to manifest internal truth, when it demands expression, is necessary for those who have resolved to live without suffering and without lying? How many times have we smothered in silence the unexpected things which were born in us, and rose to our lips! I cannot think of it without regret and remorse. I seem to see them undulating below the still water, sluggish and shapeless. And they might have grown in us, who knows into what new joys, new pangs, new beauties, meeting each other in the currents of our living voices. Ah, woe to the one who hides, who dissimulates, who smothers, who lies before life! Why have we remained up to this time without looking into each other's eyes? Were we afraid to read shame in our glances? Were we afraid to acknowledge by looks what we already knew?

BIANCA MARIA [*with anguish*] We know what cannot be and can never be.

ALESSANDRO. Ah, another prohibition to life!

BIANCA MARIA. We know that there are things stronger than death—to separate mortals. Death could not separate us as these do.

ALESSANDRO. What are they?

*BIANCA MARIA. You know. Sacred things.

ALESSANDRO. Ah, I would wither a thousand lives that your lips might drink, Bianca Maria!

BIANCA MARIA. Do not speak to me thus! . . . There is, near you, bound up with yours, a life far more precious than mine: a life almost divine. She is so penetrating that I have never been able to approach her without trembling in every vein. Nothing seems unknown to her, and nothing strange. Every time I have been able to force myself toward her, I have felt in her I know not what mysterious beauty that exalted and humiliated me at the same time. And I have never wept as I have upon those knees, with a weeping that gave me so much relief and so much pain.

ALESSANDRO. You do not know what terrible and unexpected sterility Time brings to the highest human union. The most powerful roots remain buried and latent below the ground; their subterranean force becomes inert forever, produces neither leaf nor flower. But do you not feel, when your life is near mine, a mysterious vibration that resembles the ferment of spring? Your presence alone is sufficient to give to my mind boundless fertility. When we were upon the loggia the other day, in the silence that followed the outcry, and the wind blew your hair toward me, my soul in a moment expanded beyond all bounds, encompassing an infinite number of new ideas; and the dust of the sepulchers was for me a flood of germs eager to sprout. We sit, one by the side of the other, in a desert far from the tracks of man, motionless and mute as the country at dawn, yet every breath of wind would waft to us marvelous germs.

BIANCA MARIA. In you, in you alone is all the power.

ALESSANDRO. In you, in you are all those things which men mourn without ever having possessed them. When I look at you, when I hear the rhythm of your breath, I feel that there are other beauties to be revealed, other possessions to be conquered and that there may be, in this world, things one can do, as delicious as the sweetest dreams of poetry. I do not know how to tell you what I experienced

one day, standing beside you, at the first appearance of my love and my desires. It was an extraordinary feeling which I can describe only by analogy with a re-awakening of my distant adolescence. . . . I remember that re-awakening as a joyful birth, a glorious dawn in which I was born to another life, infinitely purer and stronger, and suddenly the hands of Destiny, firmly clasped around my head, were removed. I was sailing from Apulia toward the waters of Greece for the first time. It was in the Gulf of Corinth, in the Bay of Salona, at the anchorage of Itea where I was to land and ascend to Delphi. You know those places, you who have wandered over all the shores consecrated to Mystery and Beauty. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*as in a dream*] Salona! I remember: an azure bay, with little hidden harbors like the cavities of shells, and pink like shells, in the evening. . . . Upon the caverned mountains, among the rocks, on some patch of reddish soil, waved a few meager ears of wheat, mixed in with tufts of aromatic herbs. . . . I remember: one evening the stubble fields upon one mountain caught fire. The light and serpentine flames ran among the rocks with the rapidity of lightning. I never saw such a quick and bright fire. The breeze carried to us the aroma of the burning herbs. All the sea seemed perfumed with mild mint. Thousands of frightened falcons circled above that fire, filling the whole sky with their cries. •

ALESSANDRO. There it was, there it was! , I had fallen asleep upon the deck, my face turned toward the stars, that August night. The rattling of the chains awoke me at sunrise, when the ship had been made fast. You know, you know to what distance, even in our day, Parnassus extends the sanctity of its ancient myth. Your eyes, before which have passed the most beautiful and the most august visions of the earth, have certainly drunk in that ideal light which encircles the Apollinean mountain on summer mornings. Still recumbent I saw nothing but the fabled summits in the mute pallor of the sky; but from the shore came the chant of the cocks: a lively and proud chant in unceasing calls and unceasing answers, that alone invaded the

silence of the sublime solitude. Ah, never, never shall I forget the joyful promises that were made to my new life, in that place and in that dawn, by this inspiring chant! . . .

BIANCA MARIA. It is true! It is true! I remember. . .

ALESSANDRO. Well, then, the extraordinary emotions of that far distant morning took possession of my spirit again in that generous hour in which I discovered the power that lies in you. Your lips were motionless, but from your very blood I could hear a song arise that renewed those old promises. Ah, I knew it! I knew it! I knew well that all the promises, sooner or later, would be fulfilled. For this I have waited confidently. I have waited for my spirit to obtain to perfect maturity that it might be capable of the supreme sweetness. I have enlarged its knowledge by every means that it might be better able to appreciate the greater value of every new gift. I have led it to every fountain, I have poured on it every fragrance, I have filled it with every essence, in order that, in its very fullness, it might feel more keenly its insatiable nature. And I waited, I waited! And you came like a messenger, you appeared on my path at the moment when I was turning back perplexed, assailed by uneasiness on account of the over-long delay. At other times I had looked at you, had listened to the sound of your voice; but in that moment you appeared like a new creature slipping suddenly out of a chrysalis that had hidden you. . . . Before, I had looked at you without seeing, I had listened to you without hearing. Now I recognize you, and you recall to me all the promises of that distant morning. I will not renounce one of them, even if I have to use violence to compel Destiny to fulfill them.

BIANCA MARIA [*writhing in agony*] Be silent, be silent! You speak as if intoxicated. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*without further restraining his ardor*] I need you, I need you! If ever the shapes I have given to my thoughts have appeared beautiful to you, if ever the words of my poetry have seemed comforting to you, if ever you have recognized any height in my intellect, I beg you, I beseech you . . . do not misjudge this impulse that urges

me toward you. My life in this moment is like a river swollen by the waters of spring, clogged with an uprooted forest, that cannot find an outlet. You alone are able to remove this impediment; you alone, with a blade of grass, with the stem of a flower in your little hand. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Not I, not I! Your dream blinds you. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You, you alone! I have met you in a dream as I meet you now in life. You belong to me as if you were my own creation, made by my hands, inspired by my breath. Your image is beautiful within me, as an idea is beautiful in me. When your eyelids quiver, it seems to me that they quiver like my blood, and that the shadows of your eyelashes touch the very bottom of my heart. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*as if lost*] Be silent! Be silent! I feel like suffocating. . . . Ah, I can live no longer, I can live no longer!

ALESSANDRO. You cannot live except in me, because you are in my life, as your voice is in your mouth. How long have I awaited you! With what faith have I awaited you! I do not ask what you have done in the years during which we remained strangers to each other, hidden from each other, invisible to each other, though at times together, though at times breathing under the same sky. I know it, I know it! You have immersed your soul in Mystery and Beauty, you have drunk Poetry at the most remote fountains, you have dreamed your dreams in the glory of the loftiest destinies ever accomplished. I know, I know what you have done that I might find the antique human soul present in the freshness of your love. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*in utter confusion*] You exalt the most humble of all creatures with your breath. I have only been a good sister; everywhere I have carried my simple tenderness for my brother who labored.

ALESSANDRO. But did not another being live beside the good sister? She breathed upon the golden medals of Syracuse scarcely dug out of the tarnishing soil, and the immortal impressions became bright again under the warmth of her fingers. She knelt beside the trenches

where lay the prostrate statues, freed their faces from the inert crust, and saw under the opaque clay, the serene smile of a life divine. At Marathon, on the battlefield, she read, with eyes full of tears, the names of the fallen Athenians inscribed upon a heroic column; and at Delphi she divined the mystic melody of the pæan engraved upon the marble of a sacred shaft. Wherever a vestige remained of the grand myths, or a fragment of the beautiful imagery, into which the chosen race transfigured the forces of nature, she passed with her animating grace, journeying lightly the length of the centuries, like the song of the nightingale along a country strewn with ruins. . . .

BLANCA. MARIA. Who was she? Am I to recognize myself in her? For you everything becomes transfigured! I have only been a weak, though willing helper; the joys and pains of my brother were my joys and my pains. My heart trembled when his heart trembled. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Ah, what mystery, what beauty is there that you do not reflect in your person? You too, you too, like Cassandra, whose ashes and whose golden ornaments you have gathered, have put your foot upon the threshold of the Scæan gate. Across the strata of the seven towns, one built on top of the other, your eyes have discerned the signs of the fatal fire, prophesied by the indefatigable voice of her who now lies there silent, in your shadow. Has the illusion of time not yet disappeared for you? Is the distance of centuries not yet abolished for you? It was necessary that at last I should find in a living and beloved creature, that unity of life to which the whole strength of my art aspires. You alone possess the divine secret. When your hand takes the diadem which adorned the brow of the prophetess, the gesture seems to evoke the antique soul; and an ideal resurrection seems to magnify an act so simple. There is in you a life-giving power of which you yourself are unconscious. The simplest of your acts suffices to reveal to me a truth of which I was ignorant. And love is like the intellect: it shines in proportion to the truth it discovers. Tell me then, tell me: what seems to you most sacred,

most worthy to be preserved and exalted above any obstacle and against any interdiction.

BIANCA MARIA [*powerless*] No, no . . . You are intoxicated with your own emotions. What you see in me, is in your own eyes. Your words create out of nothing the image you wish to love. In you, in you is all the power. . . .

ALESSANDRO. What of it? What of it? *All the power that is in me would remain shut in and would be wasted in a thousand little whirls of emotion, if the divine voluptuousness that is in you did not attract and incite it to manifest itself in the form and in the words of joy. Joy, joy, is what I ask of you! The other day, when I gave you the flowers, traces of tears were on your face; but around you, in the sunshine, every single hair on your head breathed joy impatiently. I must be free and happy in the fullness of your love, to find at last the celestial harmony sought by more than one. I need you! I need you!

BIANCA MARIA [*summoning all her strength*] Well then, tell me, tell me: what are you going to do? What are you going to do with me, with the people whom I love, whom you love? Tell me! [*A pause.*]

ALESSANDRO. Let destiny be accomplished. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. But the sorrow? But the sorrow? Do you not feel that a cloud of grief is upon our heads, growing denser and crushing us? Do you not feel that the beloved souls nearest to us are suffering from their divination of a sin, or from their apprehension of a catastrophe which they do not know how to meet? *A moment ago you reminded me of my tears. . . . Ah, if I could only tell you all the anguish of that day,—if I could only tell you my misery and my dismay! *She knew, she knew.* I felt that *she knew.* Her hands so full of life—ah, too full of life!—dug into my soul as one searches a garment for the most hidden folds. An unspeakable torture! My secret was in her hands, and she plucked it as one plucks the petals of a cut rose. And yet I felt in her I know not what sweetness, mingled with her despair; and it seemed to me that her heart was in turns contracting like a knot

and opening like a flower, and that she would rise eagerly toward life. . . . [*A pause.*]

ALESSANDRO [*hesitating*] You believe that she is sure?

BIANCA MARIA. She is sure. [*A pause*] And he? You do not think that he has a suspicion?

ALESSANDRO. Oh, no! No suspicion lies in him. I know him well. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. But the strange change in him, his secret and almost savage sadness, his attitude toward me. . . . At times he fixes upon me a glance I cannot bear. When I go near him, when I take his hands, it seems sometimes that a violent aversion arises in all his being. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You are mistaken, Bianca Maria. He has no suspicion, but his condition troubles him strangely. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. His condition! Then you also think that he is really ill?

ALESSANDRO. His nerves are strained by too long and too fierce a tension. Dark imaginations must torment his weakened spirit. Certainly there is something inexplicable about him. . . . But he will speak to me, he will reveal to me the hallucination which pursues him; he will confess to me his terror. A man cannot with impunity uncover the sepulchers and look at the faces of the dead; and of such dead! [*A pause*] He will speak to me. Last night he was about to speak. . . . I will find him to-night. You do not know where he has gone?

BIANCA MARIA. I do not know. Perhaps to the fountain of Perseus. That is the place he prefers when he desires to be alone. The water! The water! Ah, what in the world is more beautiful than the water? Everything here is dried up, everywhere there is thirst, thirst! . . . There is the only refuge; there is a sweet murmur that soothes, that soothes the thoughts. [*She leaves the table, where the golden relics are, moving toward the balcony with a slowness almost of abandon*] The water! The water! How long since I saw a large river flowing through green meadows, a lake in a wreath of woods, a waterfall whiter than snow. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*pale with emotion, stopping her suddenly*

on her way, taking her hands] Ah, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, and sweet, indeed, and fresh, in truth, like water that flows, like water that quenches. . . . All your beauty, ah, it seems all your beauty inundates my senses like living water, like water that palpitates, that trembles. . . . Ah, beautiful, beautiful, for no one so beautiful as for me!

BIANCA MARIA [*faintly*] Leave me! Leave me, Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO [*as if intoxicated*] I feel the love well up in all your veins, in your hair; I see it gush forth from under your eyelids. . . . I breathe the aroma of the tears in your eyes. . . . Your whole form vanishes into mine. . . . You are all within me, like a nectar that I have drunk. . . . [*He leans over to kiss her lips. She starts back amazed, scarcely suppressing a cry. They remain face to face, panting, unable to speak.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*shivering*] Listen!

ALESSANDRO. What is it?

BIANCA MARIA. *Her voice.* [*Both stand listening for a moment*] It is her voice, it is her voice. She is looking for you; surely she is looking for you.

ALESSANDRO. Do not fear, do not fear.

BIANCA MARIA. She knows everything, she understands everything. . . . It is not possible to conceal. . . . As soon as she crosses the threshold she will hear our pulses beat. It is not possible to hide. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*with sadness*] We need not hide anything from a soul that deserves to hear the truth, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA. But the pain, but the pain. . . .

ALESSANDRO. She is the slave of pain. It is not given to us to do anything to set her free. She is in another life.

BIANCA MARIA. In another life! [*She bows her head and moves toward the door.*]

[*Anna, guided by The Nurse, appears upon the threshold. Her whole manner expresses grief, though she is strangely calm.*]

ANNA. Bianca Maria!

BIANCA MARIA [*taking her hand*] Here I am.

ANNA. Go, go, nurse. [*The Nurse retires.* Bianca

Maria leads the blind woman toward Alessandro] Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO. I am here, Anna.'

[The blind woman holds out her hand to him. He grasps it, and she remains for some moments in silence, standing between the two. Then detaching herself from him, she draws Bianca Maria toward her.]

ANNA. Give me a kiss, Bianca Maria. *[She kisses her on the mouth]* You seem to have been away from me an endless time. . . . What have you been doing? *[Bianca Maria confused, hesitates to answer]* What have you been doing?

BIANCA MARIA *[bewildered]* I have been here, almost all day, assisting my brother.

[Alessandro goes to the balcony and stands, leaning on the railing, looking out upon the country.]

ANNA. This is the room of the golden relics?

BIANCA MARIA. It is.

ANNA. And of the ashes?

BIANCA MARIA. And of the ashes.

ANNA. Where are they?

BIANCA MARIA. Over there, in the copper vases.

ANNA. Take me there. I should like to touch them.

BIANCA MARIA *[leads her to one of the cinerary urns]* Here. Here are the ashes of Cassandra; there the ashes of the King. •

ANNA *[in a low voice]* Cassandra! She, too, could see. . . . She always saw around her misfortune and death. *[She bends over the urn, takes a handful of ashes and lets them sift through her fingers.]* How soft these ashes are. They glide through your fingers like the sands of the sea. . . . You were reading her words yesterday, Alessandro. Amid the terrible shouting there was a voice infinitely sweet and sad. The old men compared her to a "somber nightingale." . . . What were her words when she remembered her beautiful river? And when the old men asked her about the love of the god? Do you not remember them?

BIANCA MARIA. He does not hear you, Anna. •

ANNA. He does not hear me?

BIANCA MARIA. He is on the balcony.

ANNA. Ah, he is on the balcony.

BIANCA MARIA [*turning to the balcony*] He is looking at the sunset. It is a marvelous sunset. Behind the cape of Artemisium the whole sky is on fire. The top of Arachnæus burns like a pyre. The red reflection reaches this far, and strikes this gold. . . .

ANNA. Take me nearer the relics.

BIANCA MARIA [*conducting her to one of the tables*] Here are the remains of Cassandra!

ANNA [*touching them lightly*] Is her mask here?

BIANCA MARIA [*guiding the hands of the blind woman*] Here it is.

ANNA [*touching the golden mask with her fingers*] How large her mouth is. The terrible work of divination dilated it. She cried, imprecated, lamented without rest. Can you imagine her with a silent mouth? What could have been the form of her grieving lips in silence? What stupor, when she was silent, when the spirit granted her a pause between two clamors! To-night I should like to have you read to me over again the dialogue between Cassandra and the old men. Have you not in your memory her words when she speaks of the god who loved her, and of the elders who asked her if she yielded in the struggle? She appears to me to blush with shame at that moment. . . . "I promised," she says, "I promised" . . . Do you not remember her words?

BIANCA MARIA [*more and more troubled*]. No, Anna. To-night I will read to you . . .

ANNA. "I promised but I deceived him," she says. She deceived the god, who took revenge upon her. No one believed her any longer! She was alone, on the top of a tower, with her truth. [*A pause. She continues to feel of the relics*] You also, like Alessandro, love her, this "somber nightingale"?

BIANCA MARIA. Her destiny was a terrible one. She was a martyr. . . .

ANNA. She was very beautiful; she was as beautiful as

Venus. Leonardo saw her face under the golden mask! It is strange, but it seems as if I also had seen it. . . . What color do you think were her eyes?

BIANCA MARIA. Black, may be.

ANNA. They were not black, but they seemed to be because the pupils were so dilated with her prophetic ardor that they devoured the iris. I think, when she paused, when she wiped the foam from her livid lips, her eyes were soft and sad like two violets. Such must they have been before closing forever. Do you remember, Bianca Maria, her last words? Do you not recollect them?

BIANCA MARIA. To-night I will read them to you, Anna. . . .

ANNA. She speaks of a shadow that passes over everything and of a damp sponge that obliterates all traces. Is it not so? "And over this," she says, "and over this I grieve more than over all else." These are her last words. [*A pause. She holds in her hands a golden pair of scales*] Listen!

BIANCA MARIA. They are the falcons of the mountain of Eubœa, screaming.

ANNA. How they scream to-night!

BIANCA MARIA. When the air is burning they scream still louder.

ANNA. Why do they scream? I should like to understand the voices of the birds, as the prophetess did. I did not know that episode of her infancy, which Alessandro told me. She was left one night in the temple of Apollo; and in the morning she was found stretched on the marble wrapped in the folds of a serpent that was licking her ears. After that she understood all the voices of the air. She would understand to-day the screaming of the falcons.

BIANCA MARIA [*in ecstasy*] Cries of joy! Cries of joy! Such beautiful and proud creatures, if you could see them! They are full of vigorous and aggressive life. They have the colors of the rocks; brown wings, reddish body, a whitish breast and gray head. Nothing is more graceful and more ferocious than the little gray head, with its shining black eyes in yellow circles. Day before yesterday

when I was looking at them in the sky, one of the guards shot one in the breast with his gun. It fell almost at my feet, and I picked it up. Though hurt to death, it attempted to seize my hand. Blood suffocated it and ran down its beak; a sort of a sob shook it, while the red drops fell one by one. The eyes became dim, the claws contracted, the little head sank upon its breast. Another bleeding sigh. It was the last. There remained in my hand only a clod. . . . And that life, so free and so violent, had, a few moments before, throbbed in the sky!

ANNA. How you speak of life and death, Bianca Maria! [*A pause*] Is Alessandro on the balcony?

BIANCA MARIA. He is.

ANNA. What is he doing?

BIANCA MARIA. He is looking far away. [*A pause.*]

ANNA. What is this thing I have in my hands?

BIANCA MARIA. It is a pair of scales.

ANNA. Ah, a pair of scales. [*She touches the two scales*] Was it upon the breast of the dead princess?

BIANCA MARIA. Upon her breast.

ANNA. In order to weigh destiny! But it is not true, is it? It is not accurate. It seems to me it inclines to one side. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. It is spoiled. One of the golden chains that hold the two scales is missing on one side.

ANNA. On which side?

ALESSANDRO [*coming in from the balcony*] There is Leonardo! Leonardo is coming!

BIANCA MARIA. Where from?

ALESSANDRO. From the fountain of Perseus.

ANNA [*laying down the scales*] Shall we go down to the fountain of Perseus, Bianca Maria? Will you take me there? We can sit upon the stone near the pool for a little while and breathe the refreshing perfume of the mint and the myrtle that is so wholesome.

BIANCA MARIA. I will go with you, Anna. Here is my arm.

[*Leonardo enters and turns his searching, troubled gaze upon each one. His manner expresses incessant uneasiness and the painful effort at self-control.*]

LEONARDO [*going up to Anna with signs of affection*]
Ah, you are here, too, Anna. . . .

• ANNA. Did you come from the fountain?

LEONARDO. Yes, I came from there. . . . I go down there almost every day toward sunset. It is the hour when the myrtle becomes as pungent as incense, and almost produces a stupor. To-night it is very strong; it seems to permeate the water. When I drank, I seemed to taste in the water the essential oil. . . .

ANNA. Did you hear, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA. Do you wish to go, Anna? Here is my arm.

ANNA [*taking the arm of her guide*] We are going down to the fountain. . . . Alessandro, has the sun set?

ALESSANDRO [*on the threshold of the balcony*] It has set.

ANNA. Is there no more light?

ALESSANDRO. Yes, there is still a little.

ANNA. Why do the falcons scream?

ALESSANDRO. They cry until late; until the first stars. . . .

ANNA. Good-by. [*She goes out with Bianca Maria.*]

[*Alessandro remains on the balcony, his back against one of the jambs of the door, still looking at the country. Leonardo, with his eyes, follows his sister as she leads the blind woman over the threshold.*]

ALESSANDRO. What is that fire over there upon the summit of Larissa? Look! One, two, three fires. . . . Another fire there below Lycone. Do you see? Do you see the columns of smoke? They seem motionless. Not a breath of air is stirring. What an endless calm! It is one of the most beautiful and most solemn nights that I have ever witnessed. [*A pause. Leonardo approaches his friend, places a hand upon his shoulder with a fraternal gesture and remains silent*] Look at the color and the lines of the mountains against the sky! Every time I look at

them in the evening, I feel for a moment a spontaneous adoration toward their divinity. In no other land does one feel as in this, that there is something sacred in the view of distant mountains. Is it not so?

LEONARDO [*in an altered voice*] It is true. One must pray to the mountains, they are pure.

ALESSANDRO. How pure they are to-night! They seem to be made of sapphire. Arachnæus only is still red; its top is always the last to go out. But what are those fires? They multiply, they spread over the hills, down to the plain. . . . Look, below Larissa there is a wreath of them. It is strange that the columns of smoke should be so white. They seem to be illuminated by another light, by an invisible moon, do they not? They are religious columns and perhaps they carry the supplications of men.

LEONARDO. Perhaps. Men implore for rain, for the thirsty soil.

ALESSANDRO. This drought is terrible. [*A pause. Leonardo moves a few steps into the room, where it begins to grow dark around the treasures, sparkling confusedly. He is incapable of restraining his agitation. He approaches the table where lie the relics of Cassandra. Alessandro follows him with an anxious look*] Ah, see if the jewels of Cassandra are well arranged. Bianca Maria was putting them in order when I came to look for you. I wished to help her; but then . . . we talked . . . and the hour passed in a moment. . . . We spoke of you too, Leonardo.

LEONARDO [*excited*] Of me?

ALESSANDRO. Of you; of your secret. . . .

LEONARDO [*turning pale*] My secret?

ALESSANDRO [*approaching his friend and taking his hand gently*] What is the matter with you? Tell me, what is the matter with you? Why do you tremble so?

LEONARDO. I do not know why I tremble.

ALESSANDRO. Am I no longer the brother of your soul? So many days I have waited for you to speak to me, to confess to me your trouble. . . . Have you no longer faith in me? Am I no longer for you the one who understands everything and to whom you may tell everything?

LEONARDO [*repressing the anguish which suffocates him*] Yes, yes, Alessandro, you are still the one. What do I not owe you? What was I before knowing you, before communing with your soul? What was I? I owe you everything; the revelation of life. . . . You have caused me to live by your flame; you have brought to life around me all things that were dead before. . . . Ah, what would all that treasure be to me, if I had not known you? Useless dross! You, you alone have made me worthy to witness a prodigy. . . .

ALESSANDRO. And now? Now I can do nothing for your happiness?

LEONARDO [*confused*] I do not know the nature of my trouble. . . . I do not know what it is. . . .

ALESSANDRO. My poor friend! For two years now, two long years you have been here in this arid country, at the feet of these bare mountains, shut up in a ditch of the dead city, delving in the earth, delving in the earth with those frightful phantoms always standing before your eyes in the burning dust. . . . How is it that your strength has not given out before this? For two years you have been breathing the murderous exhalations of the hidden sepulchers, bent under the horror of the most tragic destiny that has ever devoured a human race. How have you been able to resist? How is it you were not afraid of losing your mind? You look like one poisoned; and at times I have seen in your eyes the glint of madness.

LEONARDO. Yes, yes, it is true; I have been poisoned. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Why did you refuse to listen to me? When you called me, when I came here, you had already been taken with the wicked fever. I foresaw the danger. . . . I wished to tear you away from that fixed idea, take you elsewhere, interrupt the terrible work. Do you not remember? We should have passed the spring at Zante by the sea, not far away. . . . But your obstinacy was unconquerable; the sorcery had already taken hold of you. . . . But now you must leave without delay. You must go to the water, to the woods, to the green fields. . . . You need the soothing embrace of a beautiful green land; you must

sleep, and your dreams must sink deep into green herbs; new thoughts must enter into your soul, little by little. . . .

LEONARDO. Yes, yes, you are right; we must leave here, we must go far away. . . . But where? 'Where? . . . And she also. . . . She also, my sister, Bianca Maria . . . should go with us. . . . She, too, should go with us. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*troubled, hesitating*] She, too. . . . Do you not think that she also is oppressed, that she also needs to breathe, to live. . . . She grieves for you, she weeps for you. . . .

LEONARDO. She weeps? Weeps?

ALESSANDRO. She fears that you love her no longer, that you feel for her no more the tenderness of old. . . .

LEONARDO [*deadly pale and hoarse*] The tenderness of old. . . . She weeps? She weeps?

ALESSANDRO [*seizing his hands anew, almost with violence*] What is the matter with you now? What is it? Why do you tremble so?

LEONARDO [*with a desperate impulse*] Ah, if you could only save me!

ALESSANDRO. I must, I will save you, Leonardo.

LEONARDO. You cannot, you cannot. . . . I am lost. [*He takes a few aimless steps about the room; goes toward the balcony; goes toward the door, closes it and turns to Alessandro, staggering as if attacked by a sudden fit of delirium*] What can I tell you? How can I tell you? . . . Ah, it is horrible, horrible. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*struck by the gesture and the words*] Leonardo!

LEONARDO [*lets himself fall upon a chair and presses his temples with the palms of his hands*] A horrible thing!

ALESSANDRO [*again taking his hands and bending toward his face, in the shade*] Do speak, do speak! Do you not see that you are wringing my heart?

LEONARDO. Yes, I will speak, I will tell you. . . . But do not look at me so close; do not hold my hands. . . . Sit there. . . . Wait. . . . Wait until it is darker. . . . I will tell you. . . . I must tell you . . . you . . . you alone . . . a horrible thing!

ALESSANDRO [*seating himself at a little distance and speaking in a low voice, oppressed with anxiety*] Here, I will sit here. . . . I am waiting. . . . I am waiting. . . . You are in the shade. . . . I scarcely see you. . . . Speak!

LEONARDO. How am I to tell it? [*A pause. The two are sitting opposite each other in the dusk, brightened only by the light of the golden treasure. When Leonardo resumes, his voice is hoarse and broken. Alessandro listens motionless, as if his whole being were contracted with anguish*] Ah, you know her, you know her. . . . You know how sweet, how tender, how pure she is. . . . my sister. . . . You know what she has been to me, during the years of solitude and of labor. . . . She has been the perfume of my life, the rest and the refreshment, the advice and the comfort, and the dream, and the poetry, and everything. . . . You know, you know. . . . [*A pause*] What other joys did my youth know? What other woman crossed my path? None. My blood ran without being troubled. . . . I lived as if under a vow; I trembled only for the beauty of the statues that I unearthed. . . . Our life has always been as pure as a prayer, in the solitude. . . . Ah, that solitude. . . . How long, how long have we lived side by side, brother and sister, alone, alone and happy, like two children. . . . I ate the fruit upon which was the mark of her teeth, and I drank the water from the hollow of her hand. [*A pause*] Alone, always alone, in places full of light! . . . Now, imagine one who unconsciously drinks a poison, a philter, something impure which poisons his blood and contaminates his soul all of a sudden when his mind is at peace. . . . Imagine such an incredible misfortune! . . . Take an ordinary hour of your existence, an hour similar to many others; it is a wintry day, lucid and clear as a diamond; everything is light, everything is visible from near and far. You return from your work; your mind relaxes; you discover nothing strange in yourself, nor in things; your breath is calm, your soul is at peace, your life passes as it did yesterday, in its continuity from the past toward the future. . . . You return to your home, filled with light and quiet as it was the day before; you open a door, you enter a room,

. . . and you see her . . . her, your innocent companion, asleep before the fire, tinged by the rosy flame, her small naked feet exposed to the heat. You look at her and smile. And while you smile, a sudden and involuntary thought flashes across your mind; an unclean thought, against which your whole being rebels with trembling. . . . In vain! In vain! The thought persists, grows in strength, becomes monstrous, dominates you. . . . Ah, is this possible? . . . It enslaves you, permeates your blood, and invades all your senses. You are its prey, its miserable, trembling prey; your whole soul, your pure soul is infected; and everything in you is stained with contamination. . . . Ah, is it credible? [*He jumps to his feet, observing that Alessandro trembles in the darkness. His whole body is shaken as by a chill of fever. He takes a few steps toward the balcony, then returns to his seat again. Alessandro's eyes are wide open and fixed upon him*] Now imagine my life here in this house, with her and with that monster. Here in the house, whether full of light or of darkness, I alone with her! . . . A desperate and secret struggle, without rest, without escape, day and night, in every hour and every moment growing more atrocious as it drew toward me the unsuspecting pity of the poor creature. . . . Nothing availed: neither the furious work, nor the almost beast-like weariness, nor the stupor which the sun and dust caused me, nor the daily excitement of finding promising traces in the soil which I turned up. Nothing, nothing served to overcome the horrible fever, to interrupt for some instants at least, the wicked insanity. I have closed my eyes when I saw her coming toward me from a distance, and my eyelids were upon my eyes as fire upon fire. And while the throbbing of my blood deafened my ears, I thought, with an agony that seemed to be that of death: "Ah, if upon re-opening my eyes I could look at her as I looked at her once, seeing in her only the saintly sister!" And, to free my miserable soul from this evil, my will-power shook it with a violence and with the mad terror of one who shakes his garments in which a snake is hidden. Useless, ever useless! She came to me with her usual step, I am

sure, but it seemed different to me, and troubled me like ambiguous language. And the uneasier and sadder she found me to be, the sweeter she became. And when her calm hands touched me, all my bones trembled and shook with cold, my heart stopped beating, my brow was bathed in perspiration and my hair rose as in deadly fear. . . . Ah, far worse than death was the fear that she might guess the truth, the terrible truth! [*A pause*] The night! The night! If the light was frightful, the darkness was more frightful yet; the darkness warm with breathing, the darkness which brings hallucinations and delirium. . . . She slept in the room adjoining mine. Every evening, on the threshold, she offered her cheek to me, before retiring; from her bed she spoke to me at times, through the wall. . . . Listening, I could hear her regular breath in sleep, during my wakeful anguish. It was impossible for me to sleep! It seemed that my eyelids would burn my eyes, that my eyelashes were like pins over a wound. . . . And the heavy hours died away, one after the other; the dawn came, and with the dawn came sleep upon intolerable weariness, and with the sleep, the dreams. . . . Oh, the dreams, the infamous dreams, against which the spirit cannot defend itself! It is better to lie awake, better to suffer torture upon the pillow as if upon the fire, better to agonize in weariness. . . . Do you understand? Do you understand? When at last sleep falls upon your misery, suddenly like a crushing shock, when the poor flesh becomes dull and heavy as lead, when all your being longs to die, to die for a time, — do you understand? — the desperate struggle against the cravings of nature, in the fear of falling, during sleep, an unresisting prey to the repulsive monster. . . . I wake up terror-stricken, as if after a crime, my flesh creeping with horror, not knowing whether I have only been dreaming or whether I am guilty of a mortal sin, more tired than before, more miserable and hating the light — I who fear darkness, — with an instinctive desire to hang my head and gaze upon the ground like a dumb brute. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*in a suffocated voice, entirely changed*]
Stop! Stop! [*He rises, convulsively, unable to control his*

pain; he goes to the balcony, draws a deep breath, and turns his face to the starry sky.]

LEONARDO. Ah, I suffocate you. Look, look at the stars! Breathe, you who may die so. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*softly, approaching him and touching his head with a trembling hand*] Stop now! Stop! Nothing more. . . . [*He takes a few steps in the darkness, staggering; goes toward the door, opens it, looks out, closes it again; then returns to Leonardo, whose face is bowed in his hands, and touches his head. He returns to the balcony. Leonardo rises and joins him. In silence, side by side, they look at the country, dotted with red fires, in the calm, pure night.*]

CURTAIN ,

ACT THREE.

The same room as in the first act. The large loggia is open: through the opening between the columns is seen the sky of night, glittering with stars. A candle burns upon the table loaded with relics. The silence is profound.

[Anna is seated near the steps; the breezes of the night fan her white face raised to the stars, invisible to her. When she speaks, a singular indefinable animation thrills in her voice, like a soft breeze. The Nurse is kneeling before her, sad and resigned.]

ANNA [*holding out her hands to the night*] A little breath of air comes from time to time. . . . A little wind is stirring, is it not, nurse? Do you not smell the myrtle?

NURSE. The wind rises from the earth.

ANNA. The earth is breathing. A while ago when I went down to the fountain with Bianca Maria not a breath of air could be felt: none! It was a perfect calm, without change. We did not speak a word, lest we disturb it. The fountain only wept and laughed. . . . Have you ever listened to the voice of the fountain, nurse?

NURSE. The water always says the same thing.

ANNA. It does not, it does not. We did not speak a word, Bianca Maria and I, and the water said an infinity of things which entered my soul like an eloquent pleading. . . . It has persuaded me to do the one necessary thing, nurse. That good, pure water that comes from the depths, from the depths. . . .

NURSE [*uneasily*] What are you going to do? What are you going to do?

ANNA. I wish to go away, go far, far away.

NURSE. You wish to go! Where?

ANNA [*brokenly and volubly*] You will know, you will

know. . . . Do not get excited; be tranquil, poor nurse. I shall travel that road without you to guide me. I shall no longer need to lean upon you, my poor nurse. Light will be granted to my eyes. . . . What did you say the other day about my eyes? "Why should the Lord have left them so beautiful, if He did not mean to illuminate them once more?" Do you see, nurse? I remember your words, and now I know that my eyes are beautiful!

NURSE. How you talk to-night! There is something behind your speech. . . . But I am a poor old woman.

ANNA [*seized by sudden emotion, places her hands upon the shoulders of her nurse*] You are my dear old friend, my first and my last love, nurse. I have still some drops of your milk in the blood of my heart, dear nurse! Ah, your breast is dry, but your kindness has become greater every day. You led me by the hand when my little feet did not know how to take a step, and now you lead me with the same faithful patience through this horrible darkness. You are a saint, nurse. I hold a paradise for you in my soul. . . .

NURSE. Now you want to make me weep. . . .

ANNA [*throwing her arms around her neck*] Ah, forgive me, forgive! I must make you weep.

NURSE [*frightened, freeing herself from the embrace and looking Anna in the face*] Why, why do you speak so? Why do you strangle me so?

ANNA [*trying to allay her anxiety*] Oh, no, no, . . . nothing, nothing. . . . I spoke so because I can now give you no other joy, poor nurse, no other joy. . . .

NURSE. You are hiding nothing from me, are you? You could not deceive your poor friend, could you? You could not deceive her. . . .

ANNA. No, no. Forgive me. I do not know what I am saying to-night, nor understand my feelings. . . . I am strangely talkative. A while ago I felt so light, as if I could fly; I felt almost merry: and I talked and talked. . . . And then suddenly sadness came over me and I gave you pain. . . . Now I feel better, almost well, after having embraced you, nurse. I wish you would hold me in your lap and tell me of the little things of long ago that you

remember about me, about me when my mother was living. . . . Do you remember? Do you remember? [*A pause*] Ah, why have I not had a son, the son that *he* wished to have — why? I should be saved now. I should be safe! No mother ever loved the offspring of her blood, as I would have loved mine. Everything else would have seemed nothing to me. I should have continually poured the sweetest part of my life into his. Continually I should have watched the little divine soul in order to recognize, every moment, the resemblance, the only resemblance; his affection would have been dearer to me than the light. . . . But the same Judge has made me blind and childless: an atonement for what sin, nurse? Tell me! What great fault has been committed? . . . [*A pause. The Nurse's eyes are full of tears*] How soon my mother left me! She had me, she had me; she adored me, and still she was not happy. . . . You know it, do you not? You know it well. You know why she died. You will not tell me, nurse, why she died . . . and how she died.

NURSE [*troubled and hesitating*] It was a fever, a sudden violent fever which carried her off in one night. Did you not know that?

ANNA. Ah, no, no; it was not a fever. Why have you never been willing to tell me the truth?

NURSE. Is that not the truth?

ANNA. It is not, it is not! In the evening, my mother stood at my bedside, and while I was falling asleep, I felt her kisses upon my face, and something warm, like tears. . . . Ah, sleep was so strong, it conquered the vague pain in my little heart; and in the dying twilight of consciousness it seemed that she let drop upon my face, upon my neck, upon my hands, the leaves of the rose which I had plucked that day from the basin of the fountain in the garden. That was the last glimpse that I had of my mother. . . . Later you came to waken me, and asked me if I had seen her, and when and how she had left me; and you were very excited. But I fell asleep again, listening to tramping of people passing through the garden as if seeking something. And in the morning, a little after dawn, you came again

to rouse me; you wrapped me in a cloak and carried me in your trembling arms to another house, where you spoke in a whisper, where everybody spoke in whispers and was pale. . . . And I never saw her again. . . . And then when we returned to our garden, you always kept me away from the fountain, and whenever you were there, your lips moved as if in prayer. . . . [*A pause*] Tell me the truth! Tell me the truth! Why did she wish to die? '

NURSE [*disconcerted*] No, no . . . you are mistaken, you are mistaken. . . .

ANNA. Shall I never know?

NURSE. You are mistaken. . . . Ah, thus you always seek to renew your sorrow!

ANNA [*caressing her*] Forgive me! Forgive me! I have caused you pain again! [*A pause*] Do you smell the myrtle? Do you notice how strong it is? [*She gets up and, turning toward the open loggia, inhales the perfume and holds out her hands*] The wind has risen, it seems to tinkle through my fingers like a crystal. Is the door of my room open?

NURSE. It is.

ANNA. All the windows are open?

NURSE. All.

ANNA. The wind passes like a perfumed river! Where may Bianca Maria be?

NURSE. Perhaps in her room. Do you wish me to call her?

ANNA. No, no. . . . Let her rest, the poor thing! She nearly fainted at the fountain from the strong odor of the myrtle. I felt her stagger while we were returning. More than once I had to support her. . . . See how sure I am of myself, nurse! I led her instead of her leading me. I think I could go down and come up again alone. . . .

NURSE. But why do you speak so much of that fountain?

ANNA. We are all attracted toward it as toward a source of life. Is it not the only living thing in this place where everything is dead and burnt? It alone quenches our thirst; and all the thirst that is in us turns greedily toward

its freshness. If it were not, no one could live here; we should all die of thirst.

NURSE. But why did we come to this accursed place? The summer has burst in upon us suddenly, like an inferno. We must flee. When shall we go?

•ANNA. Soon, very soon, nurse.

NURSE. Truly, it is a place cursed by God. The chastisement of Heaven is upon this land. Every day processions ascend to the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah, every day. To-night the country is filled with fires. But not a drop of rain falls. If you could see the bed of the river! The pebbles are as dry and bleached as the bones of the dead.

ANNA. The Inachus! The other day Alessandro crossed it . . . that great day of the golden treasure. . . . [*Feeling her way, she seats herself upon the highest step.*] Shall I tell you the fable of the river, nurse? Listen! Once upon a time there was a king called Inachus, the king of the river; and this king had a daughter called Io, so beautiful, so beautiful that another king, omnipotent, the king of the world, fell in love with her and desired her. But his jealous wife changed the maiden into a heifer as white as snow, and put her in charge of a shepherd who was called Argus, and had a hundred eyes. This terrible shepherd pastured the white heifer down there, near the sea, in the meadows of Lerna; and day and night he spied incessantly upon her with his hundred eyes. Then the king of the world, bent upon liberating the maiden, sent the Prince Hermes to kill the cruel custodian; and Prince Hermes, having reached the plain, began to play his flute so sweetly that Argus fell asleep; and in his sleep, with his sword, he cut off the big head with its hundred eyes. But the jealous wife sent a gadfly, that stung the side of the heifer like a point of fire and made her frantic with pain. With the gadfly in her side, the frantic Io began to run over the sands of the sea; and she ran, and ran, and ran over all the earth, through rivers and straits, and over the mountains, always with the gadfly in her side, crazed with pain and terror, consumed with thirst and hunger, sinking

with weariness, foaming at the mouth, panting, lowing pitifully, without pause, without rest. . . . At last, in a far distant land beyond the sea, the king who loved her appeared, and with a single gesture, barely touching her, calmed her, and restored her to human form, and she gave birth to a black child. And from this black child, after five generations, descended the Danaïdes, the fifty Danaïdes. . . . [*She leans over toward The Nurse, whose head has sunk upon her breast in slumber*] Are you asleep, nurse?

NURSE [*shaking herself*] No, no. . . . I am listening.

ANNA. You are sleepy, poor nurse. At one time it was you, who told me stories to make me sleep. . . . Go, go and rest yourself, nurse. I will call you. I am expecting Alessandro.

NURSE. No, I am not sleepy. . . . But your voice is so sweet. . . .

ANNA. Is Alessandro in his room?

NURSE. He is.

ANNA. I heard him close his door. . . . I heard the key turn.

NURSE. Do you wish me to call him?

ANNA. No, no! . . . Perhaps he desires to be alone; he may be working. . . . [*Listening*] Some one is coming up the stairs.

[*The Nurse rises and goes toward the first door on the right.*]

[*Enter Leonardo, hesitating. He appears less oppressed by his trouble. He is dejected but somewhat resigned; he has been weeping.*]

LEONARDO [*approaching the blind woman humbly*] You are here, Anna. . . . You are alone. . . .

ANNA [*rising and holding out her hands*] I was waiting for some one to come. Alessandro is still in his room, and Bianca Maria . . . I think is resting. . . . She came near fainting down there at the fountain, overcome by the strong fragrance of the myrtle. . . . [*Turning to The Nurse*] Go, nurse. I will call you.

[*The Nurse goes out through the second door to the left.*]

LEONARDO. Ah, she nearly fainted. . . .

ANNA. A dizziness. . . . She plunged her hands into the water to recover herself. I brought her back. . . . How well I can find my way! I believe I could go down alone and come up alone. . . .

LEONARDO. You could not lose your way. . . .

ANNA. Not on that path.

LEONARDO. Will you be seated, Anna?

ANNA. No, I should like to step out on the loggia. The night must be marvelous.

[*Leonardo guides her up the steps. Both stop between the columns. Anna leans against a column, her face turned toward the sky.*]

LEONARDO. It is marvelous; and so clear that one can distinguish all the stones in the walls of the Dead City.

ANNA. You call it dead, the city of the golden treasure! It seems to me that for you, it ought to be living with a life incredible. I should think that you would see forever what you alone have seen.

LEONARDO. Ah, it is dead, dead indeed. . . . It has given me all that it could give. To-day it is no more than a desecrated cemetery. The five sepulchers are nothing but five empty and shapeless mouths.

ANNA. They must be hungry again. . . . [*A pause*]
Are you looking at the stars?

LEONARDO. They never shone more brightly; their scintillation is so rapid and so strong that they seem near to us. The Big Dipper almost frightens me. It flames as if it had entered the terrestrial atmosphere. The Milky Way seems to wave in the wind like a long veil.

ANNA. Ah, at last you recognize the beauty of the sky! Alessandro said that, fascinated by the sepulchers, you had forgotten the beauty of the heavens.

LEONARDO. To look at the stars, the eyes must be pure.

ANNA. Did not Bianca Maria give you the ointment for your suffering eyes, which she promised you?

LEONARDO [*with a changed voice*]. Yes, indeed, my eyes are beginning to improve. . . .

ANNA [*sweetly, trying to get nearer to his soul*] You have some grudge against your sister, Leonardo. . . .

LEONARDO [*trembling*] I?

ANNA. More than once, Leonardo, more than once I have noticed your excited state when she was present, or when some one spoke of her. . . .

LEONARDO [*trembling*] You have noticed. . . .

ANNA. Have you no confidence in me? Do you not think that my soul is fitted for the truth? Do you not believe that I am partly of the life beyond? Beyond the beautiful and cruel life which the light of day illuminates?

LEONARDO. Of what truth do you speak, Anna? Of what truth?

ANNA. Of the truth that I know, that no one can hide, that no one can change, that no one can change. [*A pause. Leonardo, shocked and perplexed, looks at her fixedly, his back against the other column*] I see that you are excited, full of anxiety and fear. . . . I know you are suffering. And you are not suffering alone, Leonardo; we all suffer; and each of us tries to hide it from the others; and each is conscious of committing an offense against the others, and against himself, because he feels that his faith is shaken; and we live without courage, doubting and humiliated, while truth is seated in the midst of us, and looks at us with inflexible eyes. . . .

LEONARDO. I do not understand you.

ANNA. Oh, do not try to spare me! if you recognize any nobility in my soul, if it seems to you that I have been so many years a neither unworthy nor useless companion of the man whom you love and admire above all others, if you think that I am not undeserving of the fraternal kindness that you have shown me at all times, Leonardo, do not try to spare me; do not show for me the pity which you would have for a poor and weak creature, afraid of pain! The air of the night alone passes between us. This is the moment for us to speak out all that is most serious and strongest within us. Any delay will be a weakness, a peril perhaps. . . .

LEONARDO [*surprised and trembling*] I am amazed. . . . Your words were unexpected. . . .

ANNA. I have felt for a long time that you were suffering; for too long a time have I felt in my darkness. . . . I cannot express it, I cannot express it. . . . I feel as if a web of secret things were being woven in silence . . . an impalpable web, which, however, at times holds me like a snare. . . . Ah, I cannot live so. I cannot continue to live so; I can live no longer if not in truth, for the light of my eyes has gone out. Well, then, let us tell the truth. I, I alone am the cause of this misery. I no longer belong to this beautiful and cruel world. I am an impediment, an inert obstacle against which so much hope and so much strength hurl themselves and break into fragments. . . . What crime is it then, if that dear creature obeys, trembling and weeping, the fate that ensnares her? Why should you deprive her of your tenderness, when everything that is human in her yields to the greatest of human needs? Something was slumbering in her which now has suddenly awakened, and she herself is frightened by the power of that awakening, she herself trembles at it and weeps. . . . Ah, I know, I know how ardent the desire to live is in her blood! I have held it in my hands, I have felt it beat between my fingers like a wild lark fresh and fragrant with the morning air it drank in. All her face, encircled by her hair, beat like a violent pulse. I had never felt such a strong pulse. The vital power that is in her is incredible. She herself is afraid of it, as of some unknown evil, as of a frenzy going to overwhelm her. At times she believes that she has smothered it under the weight of her anguish, but suddenly it again overwhelms her, and a new voice comes to her lips and she speaks as if inspired. . . . A while ago, before you entered, standing by the ashes and the golden treasure, she told me about a wounded falcon, and the rushing of a thousand wings was in her new voice. [*A pause. Leonardo listens intently without stirring, as if petrified*] What is her crime if she loves? Do you not think, Leonardo, do you not think that her youth has already been sacrificed at your side too long? Can your

brotherly love ask the sacrifice of her entire life? She felt as if she were dying that morning, when she read the lamentation of Antigone. . . . It is not possible that all her vitality should be consumed in sacrifice. She needs pleasure. She was made to give and to receive pleasure. Would you, Leonardo, would you have her renounce her legitimate share of joy? [*A pause. Her courage seems to sink*] And he. . . . [*Her voice dies on her lips. Leonardo shows extreme agony*] . . . How could he fail to love her? He must indeed recognize in her the living embodiment of his loftiest dream: the goddess of Victory that is to crown his life. What am I to him, but a heavy chain, an unbearable burden? You know what a profound aversion he has to all inert grief, to all useless pain, to any prohibition, to any obstacle that may hinder the upward flight of noble forces toward their highest development. You know with what assiduous vigilance he looks about him, and absorbs all that may increase and accelerate the active force of his spirit, to fit him for the works of beauty that he is to accomplish. . . . Ah, what am I, of what value is a poor, half dead husk, as compared with the infinite world of poetry that he carries within him, and which, some day, he will reveal to humanity? What is my solitary sadness, compared to the infinite grief, which he can alleviate with the revelation of his pure art? I am only half alive. . . . I have already one foot in the shadow. I need to take one step only, one little step to disappear . . . oh, a very little step! I know, I know all that gathers and twines around this, my remnant of life, to render it more binding, the legitimate tie, custom, prejudice, pity and remorse. . . . I remember a stone column, corroded and broken, on the shore of a former port, filled with sand, where the skeleton of a ship showed above the water; I remember the useless wreck, around which one could still see the knots of the worn out cables, and remnants of the old anchors. . . . It was the saddest sight to be found; and the open sea, looked upon from that point of view, was a promise unspeakably alluring. [*A pause. She inclines her head upon her breast for a moment, gathering strength. Then she shakes herself and holds her*

hands out to Leonardo, whom excess of emotion prevents from speaking] I lose what I love and save what I can! Put your hands in mine, Leonardo. [*Leonardo moves toward her, staggering, and joins hands. She shivers at the contact*] They are colder than mine; they are icy.

• [*They descend the steps.*]

LEONARDO [*in a weak and broken voice*] Forgive me, Anna, if I do not know how to answer you. . . . I will speak to you to-morrow. . . . Promise me that you will wait for me, that you will hear me. . . . I do not know, I cannot now. . . . You understand me, Anna. . . . Promise me that you will hear me to-morrow. . . .

ANNA [*with a sigh*] What could you tell me? Alas, are not my words already too many? Have I not said already what had better remained unsaid? Ah, life eludes us always, and drags us along when we wish to fly from it.

LEONARDO [*with a last outburst of hope*] Are you certain, are you? Are you certain that he loves her, that she loves him? . . . You are certain, Anna, of their love? . . . You do not deceive yourself, do you? It is not a doubt, a suspicion? . . . You are sure . . . sure . . .

ANNA [*struck by his tone*] And you? And you? Are you not certain? [*A pause. Leonardo hesitates to reply*] Why are you silent? Oh, still pity for me?

LEONARDO [*softly, anxiously watching the first door to the left, as if afraid of some surprise*] Alessandro . . . Alessandro is there. . . . You will see him. . . . Will you tell him that you spoke to me . . . that you told me all this?

ANNA. No, no. . . . Forgive me, Leonardo, forgive me! . . . To you, too, to you, too, I ought to have been silent. . . . Silence, ah how difficult silence is, even for those who have renounced life.

LEONARDO. I shall see you again, to-morrow, I shall speak to you, to-morrow. . . . Promise me. . . . I shall find you here to-morrow at the same hour, shall I? Thanks, Anna. [*He kisses her hands*] Thanks! Good-by. [*He turns toward the second door at the right. About to open it, he stops in the act, shaken by an uncontrollable trembling,*

he goes to the door by which he entered and disappears down the stairs, as in flight.]

ANNA [*listening, makes a few steps in the direction of the noise of the fleeing feet*] Leonardo! . . . He is going down the stairs. . . . Leonardo! Leonardo! [*She stops, breathless*] My God, my God! How he trembled before that door!

BIANCA MARIA [*enters through her door, frightened*] Did you call Leonardo? What has happened? Where is Leonardo? Speak, Anna! Where is he?

ANNA. Do not be afraid. . . . He was here, a little while ago; he was here, talking with me, on the loggia. . . . And he went away, I don't know why. . . . I don't know where he went. . . . I called to him because all at once I felt the desire to go out with him. . . . The night is so beautiful. But he did not hear me.

BIANCA MARIA. I was afraid.

ANNA. Do not be afraid, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA. I was alone in the room of the treasures, placing the jewels around Cassandra, so that when he returned he would find everything done. . . . I was not very tranquil, however. I had from time to time a slight shiver. . . . If you could have seen, in the night, by the light of the lamp, those golden masks! . . . They took on a strangely life-like aspect. . . . A sudden gust of wind put out the lamp and I found myself in darkness; and at that moment I heard you calling Leonardo. . . . I was afraid. . . .

ANNA. You child!

BIANCA MARIA [*clinging to Anna with a sudden motion*] There is a fear, a constant terror in my heart, Anna, that I do not understand. . . . I should like to flee; a mad impulse to flee seizes me, I don't know where, I don't know where. . . . But tell me, you tell me, Anna, what I shall do! Help me, you who are all kindness and all strength, who know how to forgive and how to defend! I place my whole soul in your hands. I place my life in your hands, that are saintly, that are the truth, that have been bathed in my tears. . . . Tell me what I must do!

ANNA [*gently caressing her*] Be calm, be calm. . . .

Do not be afraid! Fear nothing! No one will hurt you, poor soul! I am here, and I will save you. Have faith, have faith! Wait a little longer!

BIANCA MARIA [*with growing excitement*] Anna, Anna, I do not wish to leave you again; I would not like to be away from you any more! I would like to flee with you, go far away with you, and be always at your side, at your feet, your faithful slave, obeying your every wish, watching over you as one guards a holy image, praying for you, dying for you, as your nurse, as your nurse. . . . I feel perfect devotion for you in my soul! No pain, no pain would seem too heavy to bear in serving you in your sorrow. If with all my blood I could spare you these days of anguish and of torment; if at the price of a horrible death, I could destroy every trace of these things, — Anna, Anna, believe me! — I should not hesitate, I should not hesitate.

ANNA. Ah, dear one, all your blood and all your tears could not revive a single smile. All the bounty of spring could not make a plant blossom again, the root of which is injured. Therefore, do not torment yourself, Bianca Maria, do not complain of things that are already accomplished, that already belong to the past. I have placed my days and my dreams outside my own soul . . . the days that have passed, the dreams that have vanished! I wish no one to feel compassion for me, — no one to attempt to console me. I should like to find a peaceful road for my unsteady footsteps, some place where dreams and pain would mingle, where there would be neither noise nor curiosity, and no one to see or to hear. And I should want never to speak again, because in certain hours of life no one knows which words it is better to say, and which it is better to keep to one's self. And, I should like, Bianca Maria, I should like you to have faith in me, as in an older sister, who put herself out of the way quietly, because she understood all, and forgave all . . . quietly . . . quietly . . . not far . . . not too far. . . . Come, come! You promised to read to me, a while ago; you remember? Find the book and let me sit down!

BIANCA MARIA [*leads her to a chair, kneels before her,*

and takes her hands] Listen, Anna, listen. Nothing is lost, nothing is irreparable. It would be impossible to utter more desperate words with a sweeter voice than you have uttered. . . . Ah, do you think I do not understand you? Well then, nothing, nothing is lost; nothing irreparable has happened. . . . I do not know what sudden fear drove me into your arms; I cried to you to save me, to defend me . . . but against a peril that I am ignorant of, against some obscure danger hanging over me without my being able to see it, to recognize it. . . . I am weak; childless terrors can still seize upon my mind of a sudden and unsettle it. . . . Listen, Anna, this is the truth. Who could lie before your face? . . . When you entered there in the room of the golden treasure, and kissed me on the lips, you felt that my lips were pure. . . . They were pure then, they are pure now. By the memory of my mother, by the head of my brother, I swear to you, Anna, that they will remain pure, thus sealed by your own hands. [*She presses upon her mouth the hands of the blind woman.*]

ANNA. Do not swear, do not swear! You are sinning against life; it is as if you were to cut down all the roses of the earth, only to withhold them from those that desire them. What does it avail? What does it avail? Can you perhaps cut down the desire? I felt that your lips were pure, pure as the fire; but a few moments before I had also felt two lives reaching out one for the other with all their strength, and looking fixedly across my immutable misery, as through a crystal that was about to break.

BIANCA MARIA. My God, my God! • You are closing every door around. . . . •

ANNA. One remains open!

BIANCA MARIA [*with a clear and firm intonation*] I will go through that.

ANNA. It is your door, yours; the door of the future. Have faith! Wait just a little longer! [*A pause. Bianca Maria bends her head down in gloomy thought*] Do you smell the fragrance of the myrtle? It is as intoxicating as heated wine: in the freshness of the night wind it preserves all its warmth. Do you smell it? To me, too, it gave a

dizzy spell once. . . . It was in the time of great joy, so very long ago! We were going to Megara, along the Gulf of Ægina. You know that shore? It was then as white as salt, dotted with myrtles and with little storm-twisted pine trees that were mirrored in the calm water. To my ecstatic eyes, the myrtle seemed a fire, burning with a green flame, and the sea was as immaculate and fresh as the corolla of a flower just, just opening. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*raising her head slowly*] What a sound your voice has, Anna! It is so soft, it goes to the bottom of my soul, like a melody. When you speak of beautiful things, there seems to rise to your lips the echo of I do not know what song. Speak to me again of beautiful things, Anna!

ANNA. You tell me of your dream, Bianca Maria. For what country would you like to set out? For Syracuse? . . . When we came here, we thought of spending the spring at Zante. Alessandro wished to take Leonardo to Zante, for a rest. I do not know the island; but one night, during my first voyage, I saw it from a distance and it seemed to me to be the Island of the Blessed. It was near Myrtia. . . . Myrtia, sweet name! It ought to be your name! . . . It was the hour of sunset. I remember: all around, all around were grand, holy-looking hills, covered with vineyards, so dense that they vied with the even verdure of a meadow, but with something listless about them, as the heat of the day had wilted the tender shoots; and here and there between the drooping vines a mournful row of black cypress trees. The round moon, thin like one's breath upon a mirror, was gliding over the pallid sky, between the tops of the black cypresses. Through a depression in the ground one saw, far away in the sea, the divine form of Zante chiseled in a mass of sapphire, by the most delicate of sculptors, upon a rosy zone. . . . Thus I see it still! There we ought to have spent the spring. I believe there you would have found your oranges to bite like bread. . . . I am thirsty.

BIANCA MARIA. You are thirsty? What do you wish to drink?

ANNA. A little water.

BIANCA MARIA [*rises, goes to the table, and pours water into a glass*] Here is the water.

ANNA [*after drinking*] It is almost tepid. . . . I have always longingly pictured to myself the delight of drinking at the spring with my mouth in the water, as the animals drink. . . . One day I heard Alessandro drinking that way in long draughts, and I envied him. You must get down upon the ground, mustn't you? And support yourself upon your hands . . . the whole face immersed up to your forehead. Is that it? I should like to try. . . . Have you ever tried it?

BIANCA MARIA. I always drink that way at the fountain. It is most delightful. It feels as if the whole face were drinking. The eyelids flutter over the water like butterflies that are about to drown. I have the courage to keep my eyes open, and while the water enters my throat, I discover at its bottom some hidden marvel. I cannot tell you what strange figures are formed by the disposition of the gravel. . . .

ANNA. Your voice, now, is as fresh as a spring. I really hear the water run over your body, as over the statue of a fountain. . . . [*A pause*] Do you not think Bianca Maria, that the statues at the fountains must be happy? Through their immovable and lasting beauty circulates an animated life that continually renews itself. They enjoy at one and the same time inertia and fluidity. In solitary gardens they look sometimes as if they were in exile, but they are not, because their liquid souls never cease to communicate with the distant mountains, whence they came, still asleep and enclosed in blocks of shapeless marble. They listen astounded to the words which arise to their lips out of the depths of the earth, but they are not deaf to the conversations of the poets and sages, who like to rest, as in a calm retreat, in the musical shade, where the marble immortalizes classic repose. Do they not seem happy to you? I should like well to be one of them, because I have blindness in common with them.

BIANCA MARIA. Oh, Anna, you also possess in common.

with them the virtue of calming anguish and infusing forgetfulness! When you speak of beautiful things, he who listens to you forgets his trouble, and believes that he can still live, and that life can still be sweet.

ANNA. Life can still be sweet. Fear nothing! Everything passes away, all is naught. . . . How does, how does Cassandra speak of the things human? "No matter how adverse they are, a sponge soaked in water wipes out every trace." Why do you not read a little? You promised me. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. What do you wish me to read?

ANNA. That dialogue between Cassandra and the chorus of the elders. [*Bianca Maria looks on the table for the book of Æschylus as if under compulsion, almost with reluctance*] Have you found the book?

BIANCA MARIA [*opening the book and turning the leaves*] Yes, here it is.

ANNA. Read a little!

BIANCA MARIA [*reading*]

Chorus.

"Thy fame oracular hath reach'd our ear:
But certes we require no prophet here.

Cassandra.

"Ye gods! What crime is hatching? What fell blow,
Mighty and strange? Mischief beneath this roof
I plotted; all incurable the woe,
To friends unbearable! Help stands aloof.

Chorus.

"Dark are these oracles. . . ."

ANNA [*interrupting*] No, it is enough. Read no further! It is too funereal. Let us take *Antigone* again, at the place where you ceased reading the other morning. Do you remember? It was the passage where *Antigone* was

bending under her grief for the first time. It seemed that her voice was gilded like the top of a cypress at sunset. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*looking for the book of Sophocles*] I cannot find it.

ANNA. You have not seen it since then?

BIANCA MARIA. Ah, here it is. [*She opens the book; looks for the page and reads*]:

Chorus.

"So then, illustrious and lauded,
Thou wanderest toward the hidden dwellings of the dead;
Not consumed by devouring diseases,
Nor as the allotted spoil of war.
But free, but living, alone,
Of all the mortals, thou descendest to Hades.

Antigone

"I heard how of old most miserably perished
The Phrygian stranger,
The daughter of Tantalus, on the summit of Sipilos;
Whom like tenacious ivy
The stony growth enveloped; neither the tears she sheds, —
So goes the story among men —
Nor the snows do ever cease;
But forever do her weeping eyes bathe these crags.
I am much like her, for a god brings to me sleep. . . ."

ANNA [*interrupting*] Ah, the statue of Niobe! Before dying, Antigone sees a stone statue from which pours a fountain of everlasting tears. . . . Enough, Bianca Maria. Read no further. It seems as if death were everywhere. Close the book! Go out upon the loggia and look at the stars. I am tired, very tired; I wish that some god would bring me sleep also. . . . [*She rises and calls*] Nurse! Nurse! [*A pause. No one answers*] Nurse! She does not hear me! Perhaps she is asleep. She too is so tired, poor old woman! I do not like to awaken her. What is,

sweeter than profound sleep! [*A pause*]. The stillness of this night is incredible. The wind has fallen, — there is not a breath of air stirring. [*She raises her hands up in the air*] Perhaps Alessandro is also asleep. Do you think so? He has not left his room again. No more noise has come from his room. He has closed the door. [*A pause*] What are you going to do now?

BIANCA MARIA [*vaguely, frightened*] I will wait for my brother.

ANNA. Alone, here?

BIANCA MARIA. Alone, here.

ANNA. Where can Leonardo be?

BIANCA MARIA [*trembling*] Where can he be? Why has he not returned? [*A pause*] I am afraid.

ANNA. Do not be afraid. The night is sweet. He will return soon.

BIANCA MARIA. I will wait for him.

ANNA. Do you wish me to remain with you?

BIANCA MARIA. No, no. . . . You are tired. One can see by your face that you are too weary.

ANNA. Will you lead me to the threshold, — only as far as the threshold? I do not wish to awaken my nurse. I can easily find my room by myself.

BIANCA MARIA [*takes her hand and leads her to the threshold*] But everything is dark.

ANNA. For me, there is no change. [*She leans forward into the dark shadow, in the open door*] Do you hear the breathing of my nurse? It is not tranquil. It is a little uneasy. May be she fell asleep in an uncomfortable position. . . . Poor nurse! Dear, dear old soul! [*She listens again, then embraces Bianca Maria*] Thanks. Good-night. Let me kiss your two eyes. Good-night! Go and peace be with you. Go out upon the loggia and look at the stars. [*She disappears in the darkness. Bianca Maria follows her with her gaze for some time; then, frightened, glances around as if seized by intolerable anguish. She takes a few steps toward the loggia. At the foot of the steps she again looks around with frightened eyes, watching the doors.*]
• Then she ascends slowly. When she has arrived at the last

step, she staggers, and leans against a column; she remains thus for some time looking out into the night. Suddenly she slips down at the foot of the column with the noiseless lightness of a falling veil, and thus sunk into herself she bursts into tears.]

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR.

The same room as in the first act. The large loggia is open in the twilight.

[*Leonardo appears on the loggia, looking at the Dead City, over which falls the shadow of evening. His manner is that of a man who marshals all his forces in an extreme resolution. His eyes burn in the earthly pallor of his face as if inflamed by fever. He speaks and moves convulsively, as if in a sort of lucid delirium.*]

LEONARDO. The sepulchers. . . . She might fall into one of them, the deepest one. . . . No, no. . . . Even if she should remain alive, she might suffer. . . . Ah, horrible, horrible! [*He presses his temples with his hands, with a gesture of horror and madness. He descends the steps, into the room, moves about uncertain, vacillating, obeying the fluctuations of his morbid fancy*] It is necessary then; it is necessary. . . . It is necessary that she be no more, that she be no more! . . . Ah, if she could only flee, if she could only disappear, if she were only far away, if her room were empty. . . . Empty! It will be empty, it shall be empty to-night. . . . Her breath, her breath. . . . [*He drops upon a chair, passes his hands over his face as if to dispel a cloud, as if to see more clearly*] There is no escape; there is no other way out. I have thought of everything—have I? Everything has been well considered. He loves her. . . . And she thinks of dying. . . . It is the indelible stain upon my soul. . . . An abyss has suddenly opened. Everything has been broken, everything has been rent asunder at one blow, through her, through her! She is there, so sweet,

so sweet; and through her all this evil. . . . None of us can live any longer. *We have ceased to understand each other. The abyss yawns between us, who were, before, one single life, one single soul! . . ."There is no escape; there is no other way. [*A pause. He rises, spurred by his tormenting thoughts*] How accomplish it? How accomplish it? She will be here in a little while. . . . Ah, I shall see her, I shall speak to her, I shall hear her voice. . . . If at least I could see in her the saintly sister once more in the last moment! If, looking at her for the last time, my eyes could become pure once more! If I could clasp her in my arms once more without this trembling . . . this horrible trembling! . . . He loves her, he loves her! Since when? How? What has happened between them? . . . Ah, my God, my God, everything in me is infected, everything is contaminated . . . and this thirst which destroys me! [*He feels of his burning throat. He looks for water, approaches the table, fills a glass and drinks with avidity. He trembles, as if struck by a sudden thought*] Ah, the fountain! [*A pause. He trembles, leaning upon the table under the oppression of the new thought, with his eyes wide open and staring.*]

[*Bianca Maria enters from the second right hand door. Her manner reveals discouragement and gloomy weariness.*]

BIANCA MARIA. You here, Leonardo? I did not know that you had returned. . . .

LEONARDO [*controlling his excitement*] Yes, I returned a short time ago. . . . I was thinking of going to see you, but I thought . . . you were asleep. . . . Were you?

BIANCA MARIA. No, I have not been able to sleep.

LEONARDO. How tired you must be!

BIANCA MARIA. And you?

LEONARDO. Oh, I am accustomed to be awake. But you! To wait for me until dawn, there, seated upon a step! Why did you do that? When I returned, when I saw you, your face looked so wan, so ashy. . . . [*In his voice thrills an unexpected tenderness.*]

BIANCA MARIA. You have been weeping!

LEONARDO. I did not suspect that you were here, and you suddenly rose like a phantom. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. I am always like a phantom to you. I frighten you.

LEONARDO [*bewildered*] No, no. . . .

• BIANCA MARIA [*taking his hand*] Why did you run away last night? I know that you ran away. . . .

LEONARDO. I, run away?

BIANCA MARIA. Anna called after you, and in a strangely altered voice.

LEONARDO. She called me? I did not hear. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. And you stayed out all night, until dawn!

LEONARDO. The night was so beautiful; and on my way, the hours passed so rapidly. The night of the solstice is short. I wished to hear the song of the larks at dawn. . . . Still, could I have known you were waiting for me. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. I was waiting for you, weeping.

LEONARDO. • Weeping?

BIANCA MARIA [*unable to contain herself*] Yes, yes, pouring out all my tears for you, for you. . . . Do you think that I can live another day like this? Do you think it possible for me to stand this torture any longer? Tell me at least what I shall do. Take me away, take me away; or arrange for us to be here alone. . . . I am ready to obey you in everything. . . . I wish to be alone with you, as before, here or anywhere. Anywhere I will follow you without a murmur. But quick! But quick! To-morrow! If you are not willing, if you delay, you will be responsible for all that may happen. . . . Yours will be the fault, Leonardo. Think of it well!

LEONARDO [*deadly pale, looking into her face, in a choking voice*] Then you love him? Tell me, tell me how much do you love him? Desperately?

BIANCA MARIA [*covering her face*] Oh! Oh!

LEONARDO [*almost beside himself*] And he. . . . Has he told you that he loves you? When? When did he tell you? Answer! Do you believe that he cannot be cured of his love for you?

BIANCA MARIA [*still covering her face with her hands*] Oh! Oh! What a question to ask of me!

LEONARDO [*is about to speak again, but restrains himself. He moves away with irresolute steps, looks at the doors, looks at the loggia, then turns to his sister*] Forgive me! I am not angry with you. You are blameless. . . . A cruel destiny hangs over us; and we must submit to its iron law. You are without fault. You are pure; are you not, sister? And you will remain pure; you will know no shame.

BIANCA MARIA [*taking courage and throwing her arms around his neck*] Yes, yes, brother. Tell me what we shall do. I devoted my life to you when we were left alone in the world; I ought to live for you alone, in the future. Tell me what we shall do! I am ready.

LEONARDO. I shall tell you. . . . But not here. . . . Shall we go out? Shall we go and sit down there . . . by the fountain of Perseus?

BIANCA MARIA. Let us go out. . . . But down there the fragrance of the myrtle is so strong that it made me ill last night.

LEONARDO. To-night it will not be too powerful, for there is a wind blowing that will disperse it.

BIANCA MARIA. Let us go.

LEONARDO [*seems unable to move, overcome by excessive anguish. He glances around despairingly, gazing at every object as if he, too, were looking at it for the last time*] Do you not need . . . to take something . . . from your room? . . . Do you not wish to cover your head?

BIANCA MARIA. No, the evening is warm. It is lightening over toward the bay.

LEONARDO [*irresolute*] Perhaps . . . it may rain. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. May God grant it! But there was not a cloud in the sky a moment ago.

LEONARDO. And to-day, do you know? a procession started from Fichtia for the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah.

BIANCA MARIA. I heard the chanting in the distance. . . . Why do you look at me so?

LEONARDO [*trembling*] I am looking at your weary eyes. . . . They worry me. . . . Are you sleepy?

BIANCA MARIA. 'No, I am not sleepy any longer. . . . I will sleep later when everything is settled. . . . Let us go. You must tell me. . . . But what are you thinking of?

LEONARDO. Of what am I thinking? Oh, a strange reminiscence. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. What reminiscence?

LEONARDO. Oh, nothing . . . something childish. . . . I was thinking of that snake-skin we found on the road, ascending to Mycenæ the first time . . . a childish idea. . . . I do not know why it came back to my mind. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. I kept it, you know! I put it between the pages of a book, like a bookmark. . . .

LEONARDO. Ah, you preserved it. . . . [*He draws still nearer to his sister, lowering his voice*] Tell me, tell me, how long since you saw Anna?

BIANCA MARIA. Several hours.

LEONARDO. Is she there, in her rooms?

BIANCA MARIA. I believe she is there.

LEONARDO. Has she never spoken to you . . . has she never spoken to you about these things?

BIANCA MARIA [*bowing her head in pain*] Yes, yes. . . . She knows; she suffers. . . .

LEONARDO. How so? How did she speak to you?

BIANCA MARIA. Like a sister, with the kindness of a sister. . . .

LEONARDO. Did she forgive you? Did she kiss you?

BIANCA MARIA. Yes. . . .

LEONARDO [*trembling, hesitating*] And he . . . have you seen him . . . since last night?

BIANCA MARIA. No. . . . He is not here. . . .

LEONARDO. Did Anna tell you . . . where he went?

BIANCA MARIA. To Nauplia.

LEONARDO. When will he return?

BIANCA MARIA. To-night, perhaps presently. . . . [*A pause*] What are you looking at behind me? [*She looks around, frightened, as if to see if there is some one behind her.*]

LEONARDO. Nothing, nothing. . . . It seemed to me that some one was about to enter through that door. [*He*

points to the door leading to Anna's rooms. Bianca Maria listens.]

BIANCA MARIA. May be Anna is coming now. . . . Let us go. [She takes her brother's hand and begins to pull him toward the door leading to the stairs.]

LEONARDO. Is Anna coming? [He follows his sister, turning his head around and looking at the second door to the left, which opens.]

[Anna appears on the threshold, followed by The Nurse.]

ANNA. Who is going out through the staircase door? [Leonardo and Bianca Maria disappear without answering] Who is it, nurse?

NURSE. The brother and sister.

ANNA. Ah, they are going down the stairs. . . . Where are they going? [She advances toward the door, The Nurse accompanying her. When she arrives at the threshold, she bends forward and calls to them] Bianca Maria! Leonardo! Where are you going? [No one answers] Bianca Maria! Where are you going? Where are you going? [No one answers] Go, nurse, run, overtake them. . . . [The Nurse goes out. The blind woman, seized by a vague anxiety, remains, listening, near the door] Where are they going? They did not answer. . . . Yet they must have heard my voice; they had but just descended. . . . It looks as if they were fleeing. . . . Where to? . . . How my heart beats! [She places her hand over her heart and listens for The Nurse's return] He is to speak to me, to-night . . . at this very hour. . . . What will he say to me? It seems something important has been resolved upon. . . . [She hears the step of The Nurse upon the stairs] Nurse! You return alone?

NURSE [reënters, breathless] I overtook them. . . . They told me they were going to the fountain . . . they would return in a little while. . . .

ANNA. Did they not hear me call them?

NURSE. They walked rapidly, as if in haste.

ANNA. Is it late? Is it night yet?

NURSE. One can hardly see. There is a warm wind

blowing, which raises the dust. It is lightening toward the sea.

ANNA. Is it going to storm?

NURSE. It's a mackerel-sky. . . . It is lightening from a serene sky.

• ANNA. When will Alessandro return?

NURSE. This is the hour.

ANNA. Let us wait. [*The Nurse takes her to a seat and sits near her upon a low stool. They both remain silent for a long time. Anna is very alert and stirs at every little noise*] Do you hear? Do you hear that noise? Who is playing? It sounds like a flute.

NURSE. 'Tis a shepherd passing by.

ANNA. How sweet it sounds. It sounds like a flute.

NURSE. It is a flute made of a reed.

[*The blind woman listens for some time.*]

ANNA. It is an old melody which it seems I have heard, but I know not when.

NURSE. He has passed by here at other times, this shepherd.

ANNA. No, it seems to me I heard it at a time of which I have no memory. . . . It is as if you were telling me now one of those old fables of yours, nurse. How many things, how many things there are in the sound of a little reed! My heart is full to bursting, nurse, as heavy as a stone. . . . Do you think that they met the shepherd? I mean Bianca Maria and her brother.

NURSE. May be they did.

ANNA [*anxiously*]. How did they look? Did you look at them closely? Did you look into their faces? How did they look?

NURSE. I hardly know. . . . How should they have looked?

ANNA. Were they excited? Were they sad?

NURSE. They looked as if they were in haste.

ANNA. But he, her brother. . . . Did you not look him in the face?

NURSE. I did not get near to them. They kept on walking.

ANNA. Which one of the two was walking ahead?

NURSE. They were holding each other's hands, I believe.

ANNA. Ah, they held each other's hands. . . . And their steps were firm?

NURSE. They walked rapidly.

[*A pause. Anna is thoughtful and vigilant.*]

ANNA. And Alessandro does not return!

NURSE. This is the hour. He must be nearly here.

ANNA [*rising impatiently*] Go out upon the loggia, nurse, and look.

[*The Nurse obeys.*]

NURSE. What a hot wind! It is as if it came from a furnace. . . . I think I see a man on horseback on the road. . . .

ANNA [*with a start*] Is it Alessandro?

NURSE. Yes, yes, it is the master. Here he comes.
[*She descends the steps.*]

ANNA. Go, nurse. Make sure that everything is ready in his room. Do not come until I call you. Is there still a little light here?

NURSE. One can scarcely see any longer.

ANNA. Bring a lamp.

[*The Nurse goes out at the left. Anna listens anxiously for the sound of Alessandro's steps on the stairs.*]

[*Alessandro enters. He is so absorbed in his painful thoughts that he does not notice Anna's presence. He goes toward his rooms without speaking.*]

ANNA. Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO [*startled, stops*] You here, Anna? I did not see you. It is almost dark.

ANNA. I was waiting for you.

ALESSANDRO. I tarried a little. Upon the road the wind raised such a thick dust that it was difficult to advance. It is the hot breath of the desert. Night seems to descend like a fiery cinder. . . . Where is Leonardo?

ANNA. He went out a while ago with his sister.

ALESSANDRO [*in an unsteady voice*] Do you not know where he went?

ANNA. He descended to the fountain of Perseus.

[*The Nurse enters, carrying a lighted lamp, but when she is about to place it on the table, a gust of wind blows it out. The door behind her closes violently.*]

NURSE. Ah, it went out! I must close the stairway door. The wind is rising. [*She goes to close the door, then returns to the table to light the lamp again. Anna's manner expresses an undefined terror. She listens in the direction of the open loggia as if to discover distant cries. The nurse goes out on the left, closing the door behind her.*]

ANNA. Alessandro! Come nearer, listen. . . . [*Alessandro approaches her, uneasy*] Do you hear nothing? Do you not seem to hear . . .

ALESSANDRO. What? [*Anna does not answer*] It is the wind whistling through the openings in the walls and beneath the Gate of Lions.

ANNA. Is a storm brewing?

ALESSANDRO [*ascending rapidly to the loggia*] No. The sky is entirely clear. The stars are beginning to appear. The sickle of the moon rests on the crest of the Acropolis. The wind roars strangely in the Dead City, engulfing itself, may be, in the cavities of the tombs. It sounds like the roll of drums. Do you not hear it? [*He descends the steps. Anna grasps his arm, the prey of an unconquerable terror.*]

ALESSANDRO. What is the matter, Anna?

ANNA. I am restless. . . . I cannot overcome the anxiety that chokes my throat. . . . I think of those two down there. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*in extreme excitement, misunderstanding her*] What? You know. . . . You know about it? . . . About that terrible thing? . . . Who, who could have told you . . . Leonardo, perhaps? Has Leonardo spoken to you? How could he . . . to you. . . .

ANNA [*bewildered*] Why, what do you mean? What are you thinking of? . . . No, no; he has not spoken to me; he has told me nothing. . . . I . . . I spoke to him last night, here. . . . I who knew, I who knew already . . . oh, but without complaint, without rancor, Alessandro. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You spoke to him, of that horrible thing! You had the courage to speak to him about it, Anna! But how? How did you know? Tell me, how did you know? How have you been able to penetrate his secret, while even I, up to last night, entertained not a shadow of suspicion! Tell me, how did you know?

ANNA [*more and more confused*] His secret! What do you mean? What secret? Of what horrible thing are you speaking, Alessandro?

ALESSANDRO [*realizing his mistake, confounded*] I meant . . .

ANNA. Is there something else? Is there something else?

ALESSANDRO [*grasping her hands and conquering with an effort the emotion that suffocates him*] Listen to me, Anna, you who know how to bear any burden of grief, you who never have been afraid of suffering, and who know all the bitterness of life. We have reached a grave moment, very grave. A tearing whirlwind is carrying us to I do not know what destination. We are the prey of mysterious and invincible powers. You feel it, Anna, you feel that a horrible knot has been tied about us, and that we must cut it. We have avoided speaking of it, up to this moment, because to me, as well as to you, the only way, worthy of us and of what we have been, was to accept the inevitable in silence. But now the catastrophe has come. For each one of us the moment has come to look Destiny in the face. . . . Closing the eyes avails nothing. Everything that is, is necessary. I demand, therefore, of you, Anna, the truth. What happened last night? I demand the truth.

ANNA. The truth. . . . Ah, it will not profit, it will not profit! There are moments in life when no one knows which words it is better to utter, and which it is better to bury. . . . Yesterday I asked Leonardo's forgiveness for having spoken, now I ask your forgiveness, Alessandro. You said well, you said well, silence alone is worthy. To harm no one, silence should not have been broken. But he was there. . . . So many times, so many times I have,

felt that he was suffering, suffering cruelly. . . . I alone seemed to be the cause of such great agony, I alone the encumbrance! And I felt a sisterly desire to comfort him, to do him some good, to show him that everything was understood and settled. . . . And last night, I do not know what desperation there was in him when he came near me: I do not know what need of confidence. . . . It seemed, that he had been weeping, that something in his heart had melted away. . . . The stars seemed beautiful to him once more. . . . Then I felt the need of doing him some good; and I spoke to him. . . . I spoke to him of that poor creature and of you. . . . I wished to drive out of his soul all bitterness, and all the unjust rancor against that dear girl, who possesses no other fault save that of loving and being loved. . . . And I spoke to him of her, and I spoke to him of you, without complaining, without humiliating myself, but giving him some hope. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*entirely disconcerted*] Some hope! And he . . . do you believe that he already knew? Did it seem to you, Anna, that he already knew? . . . It is impossible! Impossible! Only a little while before, he had spoken to me. . . .

ANNA [*bewildered*] He did not know? . . . He did not know? . . . [*Thinking over his conversation she seems to discover some clues she had not noticed before, and to grasp the truth all of a sudden. Her exclamation is like a pent-up cry*] Ah, possibly! . . . He spoke of not understanding. . . . Yes, yes. . . . He said, "Are you sure? Are you sure?" And then. . . . Ah, but now? There is something else then, there is something else?

[*Alessandro moves about the room uncertain, as one who seeks a loophole, but does not find it.*]

ALESSANDRO [*in a low voice, speaking to himself*] After what he had revealed to me! . . .

ANNA. Tell me the truth now, Alessandro! I demand the truth of you.

ALESSANDRO [*re-approaching her*] And what did he do? What did he do then? Where did he go?

ANNA. He ran out, he fled. . . . I know from his

sister that he came back this morning at dawn. . . . She had waited for him until then. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Flight, flight. . . . It seems there is no other way but flight. . . . [*He moves about uncertain, not knowing what decision to make*] Ah, when will we look into each other's eyes again. . . .

ANNA [*pressing*] But tell me the truth now!

ALESSANDRO. And they have gone out together. . . . They went down to the fountain. . . . How long ago?

ANNA. A few moments before you came back.

ALESSANDRO. Together . . . together . . . down yonder. . . . [*His excitement increases from moment to moment*] And they were here with you before going? . . . What did they say?

ANNA. No, I entered as they were descending the stairs. . . . I called after them, they did not answer. . . . I sent nurse to overtake them. . . .

ALESSANDRO. And then? •

ANNA. They told her they were going down to the fountain for a while, to return presently. . . . But tell me, tell me! . . . [*She grasps Alessandro by the arm as he is about to ascend to the loggia. They ascend thus together and separate in the shade, toward the balustrade. After a few moments Alessandro comes back alone. Obeying an instinctive impulse, he runs to the door, opens it and descends the stairs precipitately. The blind woman appears between the columns, seized with terror when she starts to follow her husband*] Alessandro! Alessandro! [*No one answers. She gropes about in the air and encounters one of the columns; supporting herself by that, she descends the first step, then the others*] Alessandro! . . . He is no longer here. . . . I am alone. . . . Ah, Lord! Give me light! [*Following the hot current of the wind, which enters through the wide-open door, she reaches the threshold; holding to one of the door jambs she makes one step toward the stairway, and disappears in the dark.*]

ACT FIVE.

A wild and lonely spot in a hollow which forms between the minor horn of the mountain of Eubœa and the inaccessible side of the citadel. Myrtles grow luxuriantly between the rough rocks and cyclopic ruins. The water of the fountain of Perseus, gushing forth from between the rocks, gathers in a shell-like cavity, out of which it runs, to lose itself through the stony ground. In the ancient solitude, already wrapped in the mystery of night, is heard the ceaseless gurgling of the springs.

[Near the edge of the fountain, at the foot of a bush of myrtle, lies the corpse of Bianca Maria, supine, rigid, chaste. Her wet garments cling to the body; her hair, soaked with water, covers her face in broad bands; her arms are stretched by her sides; her feet are joined together like the feet of the statues upon ancient tombs. Alessandro, seated upon a rock, with his elbows on his knees and his temples pressed between his hands, looks fixedly at the dead girl, silent in frightful immobility. Upon the opposite side Leonardo stands, leaning against a great rock, which he clutches from time to time with his fingers, convulsively and in despair, as the fingers of a shipwrecked sailor clutch the rock emerging out of the abyss. In the deathlike silence is heard the gurgling of the water and the intermittent sighing of the wind in the bending myrtles. Suddenly Leonardo moves away from the rock, and kneels by the side of the corpse of his sister, bending over as if to touch her.]

ALESSANDRO *[stopping him with a quick gesture and an imperious cry]* Do not touch her! Do not touch her!

LEONARDO *[drawing back, without rising]* No, no, I will not touch her. . . . She is yours, she is yours . . .

[*A pause. He looks at the corpse with superhuman intensity of grief and love. A delirium seems to assail him. His voice is by turns hoarse and piercing, almost unrecognizable*] Do you believe, do you believe? . . . I should profane her if I touched her? . . . No, no. . . . Now I am pure: I am wholly pure. . . . If she should rise, she could walk upon my soul as upon the immaculate snow. . . . If she could revive, all my thoughts of her would be like the lilies, like the lilies. . . . Ah, who will be able to tell upon this earth of loving a human creature as I love her? Not even you, not even you love her as I do! . . . No love equals mine, upon this earth. . . . All my soul is a heaven for her departed spirit. . . . [*His voice, impetuous and ardent, rises like a delirium that increases, and falls with a thrill of supreme tenderness*] Who, who would have done for her what I did? Would you have had the courage to accomplish this atrocity, to save her soul from the horror which was about to overwhelm it? Ah, you loved her, you loved her with all the strength of your life, because she had to be loved in that way, but you do not know, you do not know what a soul she possessed. . . . All the gifts of the earth and all its beauties — beauties of which you have never even dreamed! — were in her soul. . . . It seemed that every morning when she awoke, all the breezes of spring passed over her soul, and softened it and made it bloom. . . . It seemed every night as if the sweetest things of the day remained in her soul, and she mixed and prepared them for me, offering them to me as one offers a loaf of bread. . . . Ah, thus, thus, for a long time she has nourished me; with this bread she nourished me at the close of my every day. . . . She knew how to change the slightest smile into great felicity. . . . The smallest of my joys expanded infinitely in her soul, infinitely, like a circle in calm water, until it gave me the illusion of a great happiness. . . . Ah, you do not know, you do not know what a soul she possessed. . . . No other creature could be her equal, on this earth. . . . There was not a single bitter drop in all her blood. . . . A while ago . . . [*He interrupts himself, starting like a sick man, whose*

muscles twisted by intolerable spasms]. . . . A while ago . . . all her tender life was trembling in her hair under my hand. . . . [*He trembles so violently, lying on the ground, that Alessandro rises and attempts to go to him, but he seems unable to move, and falls back upon his stone*] Ah, when she bent over the water to drink . . . I heard the first draught flow down her throat. . . . It seemed to me that she drank out of my heart, that in that draught passed away all the pain suffered, the whole shameful condition, all knowledge, all memory, my entire being. . . . Empty, empty I was, and blind when I threw myself upon her. . . . Death was riding my shoulders and pressing me with his knees of iron. . . . The world was destroyed. . . . A thousand centuries . . . a second. . . . And I was there upon the stones. . . . And in the water, still agitated from the plunge, her hair . . . the hair around her head, half immersed. . . . Ah, who, who would have done for her what I did? . . . I raised her, I saw her face again. . . . "All her face encircled by her hair, beat like a violent pulse" — thus, thus, Anna spoke last night: she who had held it in her hands, who had felt it throb between her fingers; and I saw her face again, which no longer pulsated, her cold face dripping with water. . . . I lowered her eyelids over her eyes. . . . Ah, sweeter than a flower upon a flower. . . . And every stain has disappeared from my soul, I have become pure, all pure. All the holiness of my first love has returned to my soul like a torrent of light. . . . Another gift from her, another gift from her, through death. . . . To be able to love her again thus, I killed her. In order that you might love her thus under my eyes, you, no longer separated from me, you, without further cruelty and without further remorse — for this, for this I killed her. . . . O my brother, O my brother in life and in death, reunited to me, forever reunited to me by this sacrifice that I made for you. . . . Look at her! Look at her! She is perfect; now she is perfect. Now she may be adored as a being divine. . . . In the deepest of my sepulchers I will place her and around her I will put all my treasures. . . . For you, for you, all that which is resplendent, forever for

you all that which is pure. . . . Beloved! Beloved! If we could but relight, for one instant, with all our blood, your pallid face, that you might open, for one instant, your eyes, that you might see us, that you might hear our cry of love and grief. . . . Sister! Sister! [*He bends over the dead body, calling her with a repeated heart-rending cry, stretching his trembling hands out toward the pallid face, which rests, motionless, under the wet strands of hair. Unable to resist that cry, Alessandro rises, passes before the feet of the corpse, goes near his friend, stoops and places a hand upon his forehead to feel his fever, to calm the delirium that seems the beginning of madness. Leonardo, at the contact, shows some relief. His contracted nerves relax a little; his voice falls*] Let me kiss her feet, her little feet. [*He drags himself to the feet of the dead girl, bows his head and remains thus for some time. Alessandro also prostrates himself next to him. During this pause the sighing of the fountain is heard. Leonardo raises his head and remains with eyes fixed on the motionless feet*] One day she was on the shore of the sea, seated upon the sand, with her knees under her chin; and dreaming her beautiful dreams, she enveloped her supple feet, like two tender leaves, in her flowing tresses. The sea was sleeping before her like an innocent child, lightly breathing. . . . [*A pause. He shivers, struck by another remembrance*] Ah, that cursed day, before the fire. . . . [*He covers his face with his hands, and bends again to the earth*] Forgive! Forgive!

[*A pause. Alessandro, disturbed, turns toward the rock in the background, where the path opens.*] " "

ALESSANDRO [*rising suddenly to his feet*] A step! I seem to hear a step down yonder, upon the path. . . . Listen! [*Leonardo also rises to his feet, terrified. Both listen, breathless*] No. Perhaps I was mistaken. . . . May be it was the wind in the myrtles. . . . Some stone may have rolled down. . . .

LEONARDO. I do not know. . . . My heart beats so, it deafens my ears. . . . I hear nothing more. . . .

" [*Alessandro goes to the rock in the background and spies. Only the faint gurgling of the water is heard.*]

ALESSANDRO [*turns to his friend, who is looking fixedly at the corpse, and shakes him*] What shall we do now? We must carry her away from here. . . . Where shall we take her? Shall we carry her into the house now? And Anna . . . Anna. . . . What shall we tell her?

LEONARDO [*bewildered, looking around*] Anna . . . Anna . . . she is waiting for me, at this hour . . . she promised me . . . she promised . . . last night. . . .

ALESSANDRO. What did she promise you?

LEONARDO. To wait for me, to wait for me. . . .

ALESSANDRO. To wait for you? Where? What for?

LEONARDO. She thought . . . she wished . . .

ALESSANDRO. She wished what? . . .

LEONARDO. She wished to go away . . . to disappear. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Ah! [*A pause. Both look instinctively toward the path between the rocks in the background. The murmuring of the fountain is heard*] What shall we tell her? What shall we do, now? . . . Do you wish to remain here? . . . I am going . . . going . . . to get . . . the shroud. . . .

LEONARDO [*stricken with unconquerable terror*] No, no, do not go, do not leave me. . . . Let us remain here, let us stay!

ALESSANDRO. But Anna . . . Anna. . . . [*He starts and listens*] Some one is coming, some one is approaching. . . . A step, I heard a step. . . . Ah, if it were. . . . We must hide her. . . . Let us carry her over there, between the myrtles, in the thicket. . . . Leonardo, do you not hear me? [*He shakes Leonardo, who seems petrified*] Let us carry her over there, between the myrtles. . . . I will take her by the shoulders. . . . Gently! Gently! [*He leans over the upper part of the body, while Leonardo stoops over to raise the lower limbs. At this moment the voice of the blind woman is heard in the path.*]

ANNA [*between the rocks, in the background, still invisible*] Bianca Maria! Bianca Maria! [*The two men let go of the corpse; they rise, deadly pale, unable to move, terrified*] Bianca Maria! [*The blind woman appears be-*

tween the rocks, alone, groping her way in the shade. As no one answers, she takes a few steps forward, with despairing anxiety] Alessandro! Leonardo! [She advances toward the corpse, and almost touches it with her foot. The two men stand, unable to make a gesture or to utter a word.]

ALESSANDRO *[at the moment in which Anna's foot is about to touch the corpse]* Stop! Stop! Anna!

[Anna has, however, already felt the lifeless body against her feet. She stoops over the dead girl, utterly distracted, feeling about until she reaches the face and the hair, still wet with the death-giving water. She shudders from head to foot at the clammy touch, then utters a piercing shriek in which she seems to exhale her soul.]

ANNA. Ah. . . . I see! I see!

CURTAIN

